**HanniHolidays 2016 Ficlet Collection**

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# HanniHolidays 2016 Ficlet Collection

by TheSilverQueen


Summary

A collection of ficlets for the 2016 HanniHolidays calendar. Summary will change to reflect the most current day, and warnings will be chapter-specific at the beginning of each.

Day 28: Ice Skating - In all fairness, Will had not woken up this morning with the express intention of breaking every single one of the cardinal laws about two-leggers.

Day 29: Mittens/Gloves - Will calls him either the Mitten Man or Doctor Arsehole, and honestly he's stunned the suit-surgeon-man still brings him food.

Day 30: New Year's Resolution - "New Year's Resolution," Will says. "No more Santa roleplays for you."

Day 31: Kiss At Midnight - The first time Will had set foot in the "Haunted House of Chandler Square" he had been greeted with no less than subzero temperatures, three floating pots, two flickering lights, and one very angry ghost.


Notes

See the end of the work for notes

# Holiday Cookies

Chapter Summary

Will Graham is the *worst* baking student Hannibal's ever had.

Chapter Notes

I KNOW NOTHING ABOUT BAKING SORRY

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal is not generally prone to judging his students too harshly for a variety of reasons. For one thing, this is not a mandatory class; it's more an exploration of a side hobby and a way for people to get out their frustrations by kneading dough and cutting out cookies. For another, it's entirely a group of volunteers, who dedicate hours of their time and patience to learn how to craft delicate baked goods that are then donated to the hospital. And lastly, a lot of his students picked up their skills here and there, piecemeal, so he can't fault them too much when they make silly mistakes because, really, they had no teacher but themselves and he admires those who try.

That being said.

Will Graham is probably the *worst* student Hannibal's ever had.

The first time, he came in late, which already put a frown in Hannibal's voice. The second time he confused sugar for salt, which rendered most of his creations moot. He's mixed up teaspoon and tablespoon multiple times.

And that doesn't even begin to cover the fact that he never manages to remember to bring an apron, often fails to tie it correctly so it falls over in crucial moments, forgets his oven mitts enough to burn his fingers constantly, and in general is clumsy as anyone Hannibal's ever known.

Hannibal is not the kindest teacher, but he'd like to think he's not the sternest and also somewhat capable, but really, he has no idea what to do with Will.

To be honest, he's not sure why Will is even here. Most of Hannibal's students are just medical interns or nurses who are bored and want something to do with their downtime or want to curry favor with him since he has a pretty good reputation and hasn't taken a mentee in ages. Will is not even employed by the hospital at all, in fact; if the rumors and whispers

Hannibal hears are true, he's actually an FBI student at Quantico. While Hannibal could reach out and probably smooth his way there, Hannibal hasn't really formed an connections as of yet, so essentially, he's really, really, really not sure why Will is here.

That's not to say that Will deserves a place on his rolodex either. He's clumsy and makes a lot of mistakes, but aside from forgetting his apron and being late, he's rather polite. He cleans up his messes without fuss, never starts a fight, never steals someone else's equipment or ingredients.

If he weren't so annoying, Hannibal might be tempted to sketch him, actually. He has a rather lovely face, and Hannibal's sure his eyes are lovely too but he doesn't actually know because Will never looks up.

Then comes the day that Hannibal decides to make holiday cookies, which he figures are simple enough even for Will.

However, Will stumbles in late, which sets the tone for the day. The usual mistakes happen: he nearly adds salt instead of sugar, he forgets to pre-heat his oven, and so on. Also he has a strange fascination with dog-shaped cookies instead of the standard trees and wreathes and stars that almost every else does. At least his decorations and icings on the dogs are rather accurate though.

Then Hannibal is called away for a moment, and he leaves through the back door for a quick consultation with a fellow doctor.

When he comes back, he can hear Will's voice, clear and confident and nothing like he's ever heard out of the man, and it's astonishing because Will is actually talking about baking and what's more, he's *correct*.

"Not that parchment paper," Will is saying, and there's a rustle as he probably hands over a different roll. "This one is better."

Hannibal takes a step closer, and to his amazement, not only has Will managed to clean up his station and pop his batch of cookies in the oven, he's actually wandering around giving tips to other students, who seem to accept this as a normal course of action when usually everyone snickers when Will messes up.

*Well, well, now,* Hannibal wonders, *what game are you playing, Mr. Graham?*

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This is why, after everyone is done, the kitchen has been restored to its normal level of cleanliness and the cookies have been carefully packaged away, Hannibal does the reasonable thing and holds Will back on the pretense of needing some help carrying the packages upstairs. Will, caught off guard in front of everyone else, has no choice but to agree.

"So, Mr. Graham," Hannibal starts, "do you always play substitute teacher when I am absent?"

Will freezes with one hand stretched towards the packages, and the guilty look that crumples his mouth speaks volumes.

“So you do know how to bake properly.”

“Um . . . . . well,” Will says, shifting from foot to foot. “Yeah. Kinda had to learn. I spent most of college foraging for myself, and baking was always easier than cooking.”

“Then the pretense was for whose benefit, if you do not mind me asking?”

“Look, I’ll – I’ll go away,” Will blurts out desperately, and when he turns around, Hannibal gets the first good look at his eyes and promptly stops hearing anything else Will is saying, because any of Hannibal’s imaginings do not at all do justice to the lovely sight that is Will. His eyes are blue enough to put sapphires to shame, and framed with his curls and how expressive his eyes are, Hannibal for a moment wonders if he’s discovered an angel hiding in a human’s body, and all the clumsiness comes from trying and failing to be “human” instead of godlike.

“ – I won’t bother you anymore, I promise, I just – ”

Hannibal puts up one hand, and Will falls silent as though he’d lost his voice.

“You are avoiding my question.”

Will wriggles like a puppy who has crawled into a plastic bag and now can’t figure out how to wriggle back out. It’s almost . . . adorable.

“I just wanted to spend time with you,” Will finally admits, after a long silence. “I was just . . . passing by one day, and you were kneading some dough, and I just thought, you know, if I could spent just a little more time with you, even a few moments, life would be good again. It was like watching an art master, you were so precise and strong and your baking came out perfectly and you were really, really hot – I mean, um. Ignore that last bit. Please.”

Hannibal can’t help the smile that takes over his face at that. He generally disdains flattery in all its forms, but there’s something so honest and vulnerable about Will’s words, which started off slow but gained steam until they tumbled out beyond his control.

It’s truly quite charming.

“Please let me die here now,” Will pleads, and that seals the deal.

“I think we need to start again,” Hannibal says instead and offers his hand, which Will stares at as though it’s a snake prepped to bite him. “My name is Hannibal Lecter. Would you care to join me for a cup of coffee?”

Will squints at him. “Do you normally invite stalkers to a date?”

“Who said it was a date?”

“I’m hoping you’re not about to press charges because I’m poor and don’t own anything that could make you richer so date was the next best option?”

Hannibal laughs, and it’s surprising almost as much as Will himself. It’s so refreshing to meet someone who manages to constantly surprise Hannibal with rudeness in a way that doesn’t make Hannibal want to eat him alive. Well. He does want to eat Will alive, but not quite the same way as the others in his basement, and inside, his monster is already purring at the idea of keeping this beautiful, confusing, rude man safe at his side instead of losing him to anyone who would not be able to appreciate his beauty.

He decides to listen to his monster.

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The upside of Will moving in with Hannibal is that he’s much more amendable to random kissing sessions around the house and Hannibal is treated to the lovely sight of Will wandering around in Hannibal’s sweaters and nothing else.

The downside of Will moving in with Hannibal is that he’s so perceptive he finds the wedding rings before Hannibal can properly propose, and promptly ruins the surprise by tackling Hannibal at the door and riding him in the foyer, wild with laughter and refusing to take the ring back off so Hannibal can get it finished to his satisfaction.

Hannibal still insists on a proper wedding, though.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Day 2's prompt was ornament and I, um, recently watched Dr. Strange. Apologies in advance, but I promise there's no spoilers if you haven't seen it yet.

# Ornament

Chapter Summary

> Rule #3 was always never break an ornament. No one ever said it was because a sorcerer would tumble out.

Chapter Notes

> Um, sorry, this turned into a random Dr. Strange crossover fic. No spoilers though.
>
> Also massive thank yous to my dear Slippy, who came up with this amazing headcanon when I randomly dropped by to pester them with questions.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For as long as Will can remember, there have been three rules about what do to when visiting The Mansion.

Number one: Shoes must be removed in the foyer so as not to ruin the floor with dirt.

Number two: Any and all food in the dining room is free for consumption but it's on their heads if they make themselves sick.

Number three: Never ever, under any circumstances, break an ornament.

When Will was younger, he brushed it off as the Adults being ridiculous with their weird rules. Who cared, after all, if Will or any of the other orphans accidentally tracked some dirt in? The Adults in the Mansion had lots of cleaning staff who made the entire place sparkle like new every time Will came over, and surely the tradeoff was worth not constantly banging their toes on furniture and walls. And the ornaments were truly quite lovely, but not necessarily one of a kind or irreplaceable and there were like ten thousand of them so really, Will never understood.

Well, Will is a practically certified Adult himself now, but unfortunately he hasn't passed the magical eighteenth birthday that sets him free from the state's care, so this Christmas – like every Christmas – all of the orphans including Will at the Baltimore State Home are rounded up for their annual visit to the Mansion, where they are treated to a sumptuous day of meals, presents, and games.

And it's not that Will hates the Mansion. He has some good memories there, and the food is always amazing. But he's always been a loner, so more often than not he tends to hide away in a corner, reading books and avoiding being caught with ornaments in his hand.

See, the thing about the ornaments is this.

They *whisper*.

And not like Will's gone crazy. Will knows exactly what crazy is, given that his father was crazy and so was that weirdo Verger who came and tried to adopt some kids before some bad stuff made it into the press and they were all rounded up and told not to say anything and the media had hounded the orphanage for days.

This isn't crazy. Whenever Will comes near a box of ornaments, he can hear them talking. Whispering, really, because it's so soft Will really has to concentrate to hear what they say. And honestly they don't say anything terribly interesting. Well, except for the really mean ones, but Will's stayed away from the angry ones after they started encouraging him to slit people's throats.

His favorite ornament is this red and gold one that has a striped pattern, because it has some gorgeous dark blue-purple-black patches that glitter faintly even when all the lights are off.

It's the only ornament that ever lets Will whisper back, and although it never really whispers anything remotely related to whatever Will's said, he always gets the sense that it actually does listen to him and his somewhat soothed by his voice. And given that no one listens to Will, it's rather nice, actually.

This is probably why Will, for the first time in his life, steals something from someone who's done nothing wrong to him.

When he leaves the Mansion, he takes the red-and-gold ornament with him.

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To his relief, the ornament doesn't seem angry to be removed from its warm nice house and installed in Will's tiny little cold apartment after Will leaves the orphanage. If anything, it seems somewhat amused when Will confesses the reason why they're no longer surrounded by the other whispering ornaments.

It makes Will rather grateful that now he's an adult no one really checks up on him, because he's sure he looks weird as all hell, falling asleep curled up around a red-and-gold ornament mid-whisper.

He needs it though. It's like a security blanket he's never had, because Will thought life was bad in the orphanage but it really, really sucks in the "real world". College classes are difficult, not to mention that finding money for anything but a few scattered meals along the week is like the hardest thing ever. And even when he does find a job, it sucks up most of his studying time and Will finds himself barely able to keep his head above water.

To his surprise, that's when the ornament finally starts responding to whatever he tells it.

It grows warm in his palm when he comes in cold from late night shifts, it whispers lullabies when stress prevents him from sleeping, and it makes inappropriate jokes when Will is ready to tear out his hair from frustration. The ornament becomes Will's only friend in the entire world, so eventually sleeping with it next to his face becomes so ingrained that he doesn't even notice when it starts whispering in his dreams.

*Push me over,* it whispers. *Drop me. Break me.*

Will doesn't, mostly because he's terrified of losing his only friend, but he underestimates the power of its whispers.

And one night, in the middle of December, Will stretches just enough mid-dream that the ornament slides gently off the bed and shatters on the floor.

Will wakes up, alarmed and freezing, to find an enormous golden circle of flaming sparks swallowing half of his apartment. It grows bigger and bigger, and when it passes through Will it's like an ice shard being plunged into his heart, leaving him bent over and gasping and very, very, very confused, as the whispers grow so loud that Will can hardly pick apart the words because it's like his ears are bleeding from the force of the words.

And then, with a pop, the circle retreats, shrinking from the size of Will's apartment to the size of his door to the size of a ring before it vanishes entirely, leaving beyond something even worse than the whispers.

There's a man in his apartment, resting on all fours and panting like he's just run a marathon, head bowed and dressed in the same colors of the ornament.

Then the man raises his head, and Will has half a second to gape at the dark blue-purple-black patches around the man's eyes before the man stands up so fast Will yells in shock, yanks at his blankets, and falls right off the bed.

"Hello, Will," says the man, sounding as if he's trying very hard not to laugh.

Will does not hide under his bed. He's a grown-up, of course he doesn't, the bed just happens, you know, to be the perfect height for Will to crouch and stare at the man's leather boots with more weird stylized patterns on them. "Who are you?" he demands.

"You don't recognize my voice, Will? We have spent a great deal of time talking in the past."

Will peers warily over the bed to find that man literally hasn't moved an inch since standing. Although, the man also has a point. He does sound like – "*You* were the voice in the ornament?"

The man opens his mouth, closes it, and then clears his throat. "Yes, I suppose to you, it would appear to be an ornament," he says thoughtfully. "In truth it was more of a . . . containment device. A prison, designed specifically to contain me for as many years as it would take for my powers to be sufficiently drained away."

Will looks at the pale shards on the floor and then back up to the giant of a man who's standing in front of him. "Um . . . that was a pretty crappy prison, if I'm going to be honest," he tells the man.

The man smiles. "After all the magic you poured into it, of course it was weak," he says matter-of-factly, like Will's mind hasn't just entirely derailed after the word "magic". "I truly am quite surprised that no one has noticed you yet. Your strength is something to be admired. Even without proper teaching, you have abilities that far surpass many I have met before."

"Magic?" Will repeats blankly.

The man raises his hands and makes a complicated gesture, and suddenly the golden ring of sparks is back, except there's less wind and not other random people appearing in its wake, just a bunch of sparks that light up the apartment and form strangely hypnotizing patterns.

"Magic," the man agrees, as the sparks fade.

For a long moment, there is silence as Will stares at the place where the sparks faded and the man stares at Will, and frankly, it's quite unnerving, actually. The man looks at Will like Will's seen people stare at precious relics or art paintings, and frankly it's making Will kind of twitchy, to be perfectly honest.

So Will does the reasonable thing and blurts out, "Please pinch me."

The man blinks like Will's just up and slapped him. For the first time he breaks his intimating stance and crosses his arms, looking rather confused. "Why would I do that?"

"Because either I'm crazy or dreaming but pinching might solve both questions right now."

"Will," says the man, "I assure you, you are neither crazy nor dreaming." Then the man reaches across the bed and cups Will's head with his hands, like a precious, fragile object, and kisses him on the forehead like some angel bestowing a blessing upon a worshipper. "You are real, and so I am, I promise."

Will still pinches himself, which makes the man sigh.

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It turns out that the man is named Kaecilius, which is a hell of a mouthful to say, and he's some sort of sorcerer who did something that made someone trap him in a little magical prison so that he could slowly lose his powers and become harmless, because, you know, killing him outright was apparently out of the question but endless torture and torment were apparently perfectly fine in their books.

Will unrepentantly declares them pricks, but Kaecilius only smiles in his mysterious way and offers to get food. Which he does by making a portal on Will's bed again, bringing in a huge draft of snow, and returning with a huge assortment of food.

The awkwardness finally kicks in when Will starts yawning and, lazy and content with food, his mouth starts to move faster than his head. "You don't," he starts, and yawns again. "You

don’t have, like, I don’t know . . . family to get to or something? Someone to tell that you’re free and all that jazz again?”

Kaecilius carefully folds a napkin and makes another hand gesture that makes the remaining food remnants vanish, leaving the plates clean and sparkling.

“Not anymore,” is all he says, which makes Will feel like a right prick.

“That’s okay,” Will says before he can stop himself. “You can be my family now, right?”

Kaecilius looks at him like a deer caught in headlights, frozen still as ice, and then, slowly and suddenly, smiles as if unthawing, just bit by bit. “Yes,” he replies slowly, “I most certainly can, Will Graham.”

“Good. Cuz you’re . . . kind of cool. Even if you’re a wizard.”

“Sorcerer.”

“Isn’t that the same thing?”

“No, dearest Will,” Kaecilius retorts, “it is most certainly not.”

“Whatever.”

---

Kaecilius, whether through his sheering intimating persona or his freaky magic, gets them moved into a really nice townhouse and when piles of money start appearing randomly, Will just sighs, quits his job, and focuses on his studies like Kaecilius keeps so not subtly pushing. It’s not like he can really argue though; Kaecilius keeps them fed and clothed and in a nice house, so Will repays him by not commenting on the random money appearances and getting good grades and sometimes stealing his food.

Some things definitely don’t change though.

For example, after the first night when Kaecilius had stiffly climbed into Will’s crappy little bed, they’ve never really deviated from that. Even in this bigger, nicer place, it’s become routine for them, and Will’s favorite time of day is waking up warm and cozy with Kaecilius at his side, even if the wizard – sorry, *sorcerer* does snore.

Also Kaecilius refuses to wear normal clothing, so he’s either wandering around half-naked or in his weird robes, but Will gave up on that ages ago.

Then one morning, Will wakes up to find Kaecilius still sleeping. It’s a rare thing; Kaecilius sleeps like a battle-worn soldier, from asleep to awake in the blink of an eye at the smallest little noise or movement. One time Will had a nightmare and Kaecilius nearly brought down the house with his magic, looking for an enemy to kill.

But right now, he’s definitely asleep, mouth parted just a little, one arm lazily draped over Will’s back, hair askew all over his pillow.

Which is when Will notices that the dark black-purple-blue patches – the things he'd so admired on the ornament and been so freaked out by on Kaecilius the man – are starting to fade. Literally. They're much smaller now, and more like a strange ring of bruise colors than the huge swatches of flaking skin they were before. It's almost like Kaecilius is healing, except Will has no idea what in the world could possible cause those kinds of wounds. And to Kaecilius of all people, because Will's seen the man kick someone's butt and even without magic he's definitely not someone Will wants to cross.

"You're staring," Kaecilius says quietly.

Will yawns and buries his face into Kaecilius's chest, and the man grudgingly allows it because, really, he lets Will get away with anything. "Morning, Kae."

"Good morning. Is something wrong with my eyes?"

"Nah. But those patch things."

"Yes?"

"They're getting smaller."

There's a long pause, and then Kaecilius sighs and tangles his fingers into Will's hair, like it's more comforting to him than it is to Will and honestly it feels pretty damn nice for Will. "Yes, they are," he confirms softly. "I am healing, slowly but surely."

"Okay . . . do I want to know what can cause that kind of wound?"

"A creature from the Dark – "

"No, no, no," Will says immediately, because the last time Kaecilius mentioned any kind of dimension or universe Will's brain was broken for half of the day. "No, I've changed my mind, I do not want to know, I'm just fine in my naïve little human-earth-focused place here, thank you very much."

Kaecilius laughs. "If it's any comfort, your magic is the one healing me."

"I thought we agreed my magic sucks."

Kaecilius has tried to teach Will control. It hasn't really gone well. Kaecilius has already had to replace the dining table four times and the bed seven, and that's not even counting how many times Will has shattered all the mirrors in the house or destroyed the staircases. So for now Will just kind of meanders along like he always has, and for the most part, his magic or whatever seems happy to just coexist like it did before he knew magic existed.

"That was your call, not mine," Kaecilius points out. And yeah, it's kind of true. Still creepy when he gets all worshipful and awed about Will's magic though.

"Whatever. As long as you're getting better."

"I am. Thanks to you."

“Great. Also it’s your turn to make breakfast.”

“ . . . I made it yesterday.”

“You wanna replace the stove again too?”

“French toast it is,” Kaecilius surrenders, grinning as he sits up in bed without using his arms because he’s a freaky person who does weird exercises all over the house. And Will does mean *all* over the house, because one time Will came in and found him doing push-ups on the ceiling. Not like pull-ups, with a bar or magic hanging from the ceiling, no, like standing on the ceiling like everyone always draws people standing upside down on the bottom of the globe. Will had duly freaked out, and Kaecilius walking down the sides of wall to try and comfort him had not at all made things better.

Will squints at him as he steals Kaecilius’s pillow, because it’s warm and smells like Kaecilius. “I thought you liked omelettes?”

“But you like French toast.”

And, well, that deserves a kiss if anything does, so all in all they start off the day pretty normal with a rather thorough make-out session. And a few literal sparks but who’s watching?

Chapter End Notes

Day 3's prompt is "Fireplace" and all I can say in defense of myself is that it's been a long time since I watched Howl's Moving Castle.

# Fireplace

Chapter Summary

> Truly, the last thing Will had expected was for the flames in the fireplace to start speaking to him.

Chapter Notes

> It has truly been a long time since I watched Howl's Moving Castle. Also I haven't yet had the opportunity to read the book so I'm sure nothing I write here is in line with canon. Oops.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will's seen a lot of crazy stuff in the Wastes. Like, really, a lot. Talking trees and falling stars and crazy witches and wizards. The great big moving castle is a new thing though.

"Um," Will says, when it pauses and politely lowers down. "That's new."

Still, it's really cold, the sun has set, and Will's nowhere near home at the moment, so he doesn't really have anything to lose by accepting the castle's invitation. Most witches and wizards who travel the Wastes regular know about Will anyways, and it's not like he's some fine catch that would be a tasty sacrifice. His magic is heavily entwined with his curse, and most wizards and witches just wince and back off because Will's been made aware that it's a hell of a curse.

The castle is warm, once Will shuts the door, and the staircase leads to a cozy little dining area with a cluttered table, a fireplace, and a study covered in books and papers. A crackling fire is resting in the open fireplace, so Will gets one of the dusty chairs, pats it a few times, and settles next to the fire to see about warming up.

He's so busy settling down, in fact, that he doesn't even realize that eyes are peering back out of the fireplace until a mouth joins the eyes.

"Hello, Will Graham," says the fire.

Will yelps and tips over in the chair with a tremendous crash. When he's finally righted himself, he finds the fire with eyes, mouth, and arms, and it looks rather amused as it crackles merrily in the fireplace, which is when Will recognizes the tell-tale multicolor glow of a fire demon.

“Oh, great, one of you,” Will says.

“You have a grudge against my kind?”

“What, you can’t see the great big curse I have sitting on my head?”

Demons aren’t like humans. They aren’t bound by human laws or human concerns, for example, and most of the time they really don’t give a damn about humanity. This demon, though, bears the hallmarks of one bound to a human in servitude, because no free self-respecting demon would assume a simple a form as a fire like this. His true form might burn Will’s eyes out, but it’d still be more creative.

The demon hums. “Yes, I can. And quite a curse it is. May I ask why it was cast?”

Will shrugs, because he’s had it as long as he’s known and also he’s been alone as long as he’s known. There’s not example some magical godmother he can ask about this kind of stuff.

“Hmm. One of those ‘cursed at birth ones’ I see,” says the demon. “That or you’re one of the ones who can’t talk about it.”

“Can’t talk about something you really know little about.”

“Fair enough.” The demon shifts just slightly in the fireplace, sending off more sparks, and the move changes the color spectrum until suddenly the orange-yellow fire demon is now more like a deep purple-blue blob, almost glowing like a white star. It’s a demonstration of power, since color changes are generally reflective of mood, but this demon is clearly exerting conscious control.

Will would be impressed, except he already knew this demon was powerful, so the color changes don’t really do much for him.

“I propose a deal,” the demon announces.

Will looks at his raggedy clothes and then back at the demon. “Not sure what I can offer you.”

“You are already familiar with the restrictions that bind demons into servitude,” the demon remarks. “You must already be aware that I cannot break the deal that the human made. Only an outside force can break it.”

“And you think I’m the miraculous outside force?”

“Maybe. Or perhaps I consider that the incentive I could offer would be enough to motivate you to becoming the outside force.”

“I don’t use money, I already have a house, I like being mortal, and I don’t want a random princess,” Will says automatically, because he already knows exactly the kind of bargains demons can make and he has no intention of being accidentally trapped on the receiving end of a very short stick.

The demon smiles, and Will gets the impression that it's actually genuine. Not the demon was going to offer any of those banal and common choices, but like the demon's impressed that Will has the knowledge and the guts to say so to its face.

"Very well. How about this, then: you break my deal and I will break your curse."

Will lets his chair legs fall back to the ground with a thump, staring with wide eyes. Every single sorcerer and witch and magician he's ever consulted – or rather, that his parents consulted – had said that his curse was too powerful to break, and the easier option by far was to just try and fulfill the specifications of the curse because that possibility was about one in a hundred but finding someone powerful enough to break the curse was more like one in a million.

"You can't do that."

The demon crosses his arms, and he doesn't have eyebrows, but Will can definitely *feel* the eyebrow go up. "And why can't I?"

"Everyone says it's impossible, you'd have to be stronger than whoever cast the curse to break it."

"My dear Will," says the demon, which makes Will splutter because he hadn't told the demon his name, "what on earth gives you the impression that any mortal witch or wizard could ever compare to my power?"

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In the end, breaking Hannibal's deal with his human is easy, both in terms of ethics and in terms of actually doing it. This is because Will spends approximately five minutes in the company of Frederick Chilton before he really, really, really wants to shove the guy off a roof, so he completely understands Hannibal's desperation to get away.

"How did you even end up with that guy of all people?" Will whispers fiercely as he watches Chilton dance around the kitchen singing really off-key.

Hannibal sighs. "I didn't have many options, I'm afraid."

"I think I would've preferred death."

"Hindsight is rather more reliable in the present."

Finally, Will gets exasperated enough that he slams the gigantic text of demon lore shut, magically locks Chilton in his room, and scoops Hannibal straight out of the fireplace. To his surprise, Hannibal is rather much softer and lighter than he expected, flickering gently against his fingers like a warm feathery pillow instead of the burning he expected from the fire Hannibal generally manifests as.

"You cannot remove me from this house without breaking my deal," Hannibal warns, although he makes no attempt to leave Will's grasp.

“Have you ever tried?” Will replies, because he’s spent an entire month trying to research breaking deals and found absolutely nothing useful and at this point he really doesn’t care about “cannot”.

Hannibal hesitates. “No.”

“Okay then.”

The second they pass the threshold, Hannibal convulses in Will’s hands, gasping and trembling, and as soon as they’re completely clear, a dark mass wrenches itself from the center of Hannibal’s flaming form and goes shooting back to the house. That happens just as the house itself collapses, falling into its many disparate parts, and Hannibal himself screams as his form changes, causing Will to almost drop him as he writhes and tingles, going from soft and warm to burning hot and blindingly bright.

“You’re . . . you’re a star,” Will says blankly, because no demon looks anything remotely like this.

Hannibal groans, expanding and shrinking like a faintly beating heart. “I . . . was,” he pants. “Chilton’s heart kept me alive. That was our deal: I provided him with magic and status, and he gave me a heart to stay alive.”

“Why can’t you go home?”

“It’s . . . a long story.”

(Later on, Hannibal will tell Will the full story, and Will . . . well, Will rolls his eyes for years afterwards that Hannibal got himself exiled from space because even in star form he couldn’t stop himself from being a cannibalistic weirdo. And also for attempting to swallow a black hole out of curiosity because apparently meteors weren’t as tasty as everyone said they were.)

Right now, though, Will doesn’t really think about that, because all he can think about is the fact that Hannibal is visibly growing fainter and fainter, to the point where Will can start seeing his own fingers through Hannibal’s sparkling form.

So Will says, “Take mine.”

Hannibal closes his eyes. “Sweet boy,” he murmurs, “I would burn you alive.”

“I thought you were a narcissist. Also, you’re dying.”

“No.”

“Too late,” Will declares, and really, why should he care? It’s not like anyone’s going to miss him, really. Hannibal’s been his first and only friend in the entire world, and he can’t think of anything better than dying for his friend. Not to mention that it’ll mean that Hannibal – proud, powerful, beautiful Hannibal – will never be forced to bargain his power and himself into servitude just to stay alive.

So before Hannibal can stop him, Will opens his mouth and swallows Hannibal straight down.

(In the future, whenever anyone asks, Will maintains that stars taste kind of like faint burning metal and feel a bit like a warm slightly more solid alcohol sliding down your throat.)

Will stays awake long enough to see Hannibal burst from his chest, manifesting again in his true star form, glorious and brilliant enough to burn out people's eyes and so tall that his shadows would rival mountains, and then he passes out because Hannibal's alive, and really that's all that matters.

---

And then, of course, Will wakes up.

"Um," he says to the ceiling.

Hannibal clears his throat, and Will risks a glance to see him in a slightly more human form. He still has weird horns spiraling out of his head and claws for fingers and really long legs, but he's wearing a really nice three-piece suit and his glow is soft enough that Will doesn't risk blindness by looking at him.

"Why am I alive again?"

Hannibal touches his hand. "My sweet William," Hannibal says, like it's the first time he's ever said Will's name, and it's so fond Will blushes from that alone. "You gave me your heart freely, without any intention of repayment or price. It would be poor compensation indeed if I let you die."

"That did not answer my question. Like not even the littlest bit."

And then Hannibal fricking puts his hand through Will's chest, and Will gasps because there's a *huge sparkling shard right where his heart should be.*

"You gave me a part of you," Hannibal says, like it's nothing for a star to give part of itself to a human, "so I gave you a part of me. And now neither of us must die for the other to live."

Will is a pessimist, though, so even though half of him wants to cry into Hannibal's chest and squeeze him in a big hug and maybe kiss him, the other half takes control of his mouth and blurts out, "But I'm still going to die eventually. Stars are immortal."

"And now," Hannibal replies, withdrawing his hand, "so are you."

"What about my curse?"

Hannibal shrugs. "No magician is strong enough to lay a curse upon a star. I have your heart. The curse shattered the second I claimed it. No one can ever curse you again."

"So my heart is yours now? Forever?"

"Yes."

“Oh.”

“Does that bother you?”

“No, it’s kinda hot, actually,” Will says, and then covers his mouth, because he did not mean to tell him that.

“Hmm, yes. You’ll find it rather to lie to me, I’m afraid. Our lines have begun to blur.”

“If I start glowing I’m going to hit you very hard.”

“ . . . . . ”

“Hannibal.”

“I can teach you to control it?”

“You better.”

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Tomorrow's prompt for day 4 is "Snowball". I may or may not be currently rereading Chronicles of Narnia. And those two sentences may or may not be related. See you then. :D

# Snowball

Chapter Summary

> Hannibal is a centaur who likes eating the humans foolish enough to wander into Narnia. Then he meets Will.

Chapter Notes

> Naaaarrrrnnniiiiaaaaaaaaaa!!! Also warnings for like . . . implied torture over a lot of years and, um, cannibalism. Because Hannibal.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

> To be completely honest, the first time Hannibal lets the son of Adam go trundling back to his far land, it's out of curiosity. Not about humans; Hannibal's met more than his fair share and found that when properly cooked they taste about the same as any other prey that Hannibal has consumed.
>
> No, his curiosity is about whether or not he's able to play the same games as humans.
>
> He had found the son of Adam curled up a tree, shivering and staring with wonder, and since it was polite, he had brought the human back to his home, covered him in warm blankets, fed him warm food and drink, and then talked to him. Will, as it turned out his name was, wasn't very loud and certainly not as rude as the last human who'd stumbled into Narnia, so Hannibal had turned up the charm in attempt to try out the human games of lying and manipulation that most centaurs never bothered with because he figured now was as good a time as any to try it.
>
> Will had responded with stuttering, lowered eyes, and a really passionate voice once a few gentle prods got him started, so really, Hannibal was entirely genuine when he wished Will a safe trip home and asked for a return.

---

> The second time, Hannibal lets the son of Adam go because he brought Hannibal wine. Not exactly the best wine, since centaurs have different taste preferences than humans, but the gift was still thoughtful enough for Hannibal to stay his hand.
>
> They talk about pianos and puppies and snow, and then they part, and Hannibal wishes him a safe trip home and invites him back.

---

The third time, Hannibal lets the son of Adam go because Will turns up with a giant bruise on his face and more bruises on his back, and well, eating him now would be a moot cause because Will smells like sadness and hurt and that will definitely ruin the meat and also Hannibal wants something a little more challenging than just killing this defenseless human.

They talk about anger and cruelty and expectations, and then they part, and Hannibal wishes him a safe trip home and all but demands a return.

---

The fourth time, Hannibal admits that he has a problem.

It's just that he doesn't really care. Will Graham, this son of Adam with beautiful blue eyes and brown curls and a truly lovely mind, is addicting and enchanting, and Hannibal may not practice magic but he certainly understands the power it can hold. Will Graham is magical and Hannibal cannot get enough of him.

Normally by this point, for example, he's planning an elaborate final meal or at least settling on the final touches of his flavorings. Generally he sticks to acorns and snails fattened on flesh.

Not Will though.

For Will he cooks elaborates meals of fish twisted round in elegant spirals and desserts baked with simmering sauces and gleaming sugary cages and venison lovingly marinated and sliced and composed. He treats Will to the rarest of fruits and vegetables and meats that Narnia has to offer, even if it means that he spends one day laboriously breaking a hole in the river in order to snatch fresh fish from waters that haven't flowed properly in over a hundred years. He plies Will with sweets and wine enough to make his poor human spin and giggle and doze off, but he never once thinks about ending Will's life in order to take part in the magnificent feast he knows Will would be.

How could he hurt this precious creature, who responded to the sight of Hannibal's huge centaur form not with violence or panic but with questions and curiosity? How could he lay one finger on this beautiful human, who smells like dog fur and running water and spring flowers? How could he bring himself to end his golden goose, when he could simply enjoy the regular but small samples of his glory?

The answer: he cannot.

But Hannibal knows the trees are watching. And the trees are not the only servants of the White Witch who have begun to take interest in Will.

The problem is that he doesn't really care about her anymore.

All he cares about is Will, and when his human will come to visit him again, beaming and bundled up in thick coats Hannibal wove out of his clothes.

---

And then one morning, there's a sharp chorus of barks heralding the rumblings and roars of polar bears, and Hannibal has exactly one second to sigh and close his book before the wolves take down his door and swarm him. They drag him out, snarling and nipping at his legs and tearing his clothes, and one bites so hard that Hannibal stumbles just in time for it to be mistaken for a bow.

"Hannibal," says Jadis from where she's perched on her carriage of ice.

Hannibal stomps a back hoof, and the instinct is enough to send the wolves back just a step, so that Hannibal can stand up straight. "Jadis," Hannibal replies, because she hates her old name and that is exactly why Hannibal uses it.

"We had a deal, you and I," Jadis says, her tone so bored that one might think Hannibal was a teeny tiny fly on the wall. "I didn't bother you when you ate my dwarves and wolves, and you continued your consumption of any son of Adam or daughter of Eve foolish enough to cross into my country."

"Did we?" Hannibal asks, amused. He's never talked to Jadis, and they both know it. Jadis tolerated him because she didn't want to waste the energy it would take to bring him down when she had other areas and subjects easier to intimate and subjugate.

Jadis sighs and stands, casually unsheathing her wand of ice. "Don't play coy with me, Hannibal."

"Only if you return the courtesy."

"Oh, do keep up," Jadis scoffs. "Eat the boy, Hannibal. Eat him and be done with this game. You've got your pound of flesh and your mind games and anything else you might want out of this son of Adam. End this."

Hannibal considers it, because it would be foolish not to. He could eat Will – Will's been more than properly flavored and marinated by now – and savor every last part of him, both fresh and whatever parts he could preserve to enjoy for years to come. He could go back to his lonely life, composing little tunes and sketching little scenes and waiting for the next little human to come through and eat them too.

Except.

Except.

Except his latest composition was written with Will in mind. Except all of his most recent sketches are of Will – Will laughing, Will sleeping, Will eating, beautiful, lovely, darling Will. He doesn't want to lose Will.

Jadis's face changes before Hannibal can even talk, because she's no fool either. She's like Hannibal, a stone cold killer willing to do anything and sometimes taken the road less traveled just because, and she understands exactly what it means to be more alone than anyone in the world. The only difference is that she forged her cold into a spear of ice,

conquering every enemy that couldn't measure up, whilst Hannibal retreated to the shadows and ate every enemy that couldn't measure up.

Now that Hannibal has someone who can measure up, though, he will not eat him.

Jadis opens her mouth –

And a snowball comes careening out of nowhere and knocks her ice staff straight out of her hand.

Followed by another that knocks off her crown.

And followed by another that smacks straight into a wolf's snout, making it yelp and bolt.

Hannibal shrugs and takes the opportunity, because why not. And also because there's a rather familiar scent in the air, which Hannibal is extremely pleased to note is indeed Will, hiding behind a tree with a neat pile of rather hard packed snowballs, his eyes blazing with fierceness that doesn't abate when Hannibal comes up to him.

"Are you okay?" Will demands, patting at Hannibal's chest and flank like he knows anything about centaur anatomy. "Hannibal – "

"Will," Hannibal interrupts, and then he sees the wolves coming and knows they don't have much time, so he just skips to the end and kisses Will, and he puts everything he can't say in that kiss – his reverence, his adoration, his wonder, everything that makes his heart beat faster and his tail twitch and his fingers tingle, everything that might that mysterious "love" feeling he's never quite been able to understand.

Will kisses him back just in time for Jadis to recover her wand and swallow them both in ice.

---

Jadis unfreezes them both, later, but she strings Hannibal up first, and it's incredibly more uncomfortable than Hannibal wants to admit, given that his centaur half weighs his arms down against the bindings of ice. He gets to watch, helpless and bound, as Jadis, smirking on her throne, makes Will scream as she slowly turns him, limb by limb, into a frozen ice statue, his face captured in such beautiful agony.

"Oh, did that make you angry, Hannibal?" Jadis asks. "I didn't know you could be angered."

Hannibal says nothing. There is nothing he can say.

He knows his fate, and he knows that the only thing he wants now is to die feasting with his eyes on Will's face and his mind on every memory he has of Will's scent and voice and touch.

"You brought this on yourself, you know," Jadis continues. "If only you had had the guts to eat him . . . you might have spared yourself the pain. I'm sure there would have been many after him just as pretty and tasty."

Hannibal closes his eyes. She has no idea.

And besides.

Hannibal can read the stars, same as any of his other kin. So he tells Jadis, “Your doom is coming, Jadis of Charn. I can see it writ in the stars. And you will let it into by your own front door.”

Jadis grows so pale she matches her own robes. Then her face hardens, she raises her wand, and Hannibal knows nothing else.

---

Awareness returns to Will slowly. Like, very, very, very slowly, as if one hair and one skin cell at a time, until finally he can breath and then his lungs are free and then his arms and legs and he falls into an inelegant bundle of twitching and gasping limbs on the floor, heart racing so fast he’s surprised it hasn’t burst out of his chest.

This is probably why he doesn’t die of shock when he notices the enormous golden lion standing over him.

“Um, hi,” Will says, because Hannibal always said to be rude was worse than anything else.

The lion regards him for a moment. “Hello, William, son of Adam.”

All around them, Will sees countless creatures stretching free – gryphons and dwarves and animals so large they could pass as dinosaurs – and for just one moment, he thinks about an old legend Hannibal had sung to him once, about a great golden lion and the start of the world.

Then he thinks, *Hannibal.*

“Where’s Hannibal? He’s a centaur, um, tall, horse body, brown hair, maroon eyes?”

The lion says, “You will find your friend in the courtyard.”

Will, at that point, forgets every lesson Hannibal ever taught him about politeness and pushes past the lion and runs straight down the stairs, and this time his heart does stop, because there is Hannibal, bruised and riddled with goose bumps and clothing torn to shreds, but Hannibal. Alive and mostly well and proud and *Hannibal*.

Will tackles him so hard Hannibal takes a few steps back from of the force of it.

“I thought she killed you,” he says, because his last memory was watching Jadis approach Hannibal like a vulture over a downed bird.

Hannibal kisses his head and then his hair and then his ear, like he can’t help himself, and his hug is so tight it actually hurts but Will doesn’t care. “No,” Hannibal murmurs, “Jadis always did like keeping reminders of her victims around her. She kept me alive just to make sure I knew she had won.”

“Jesus, next time just eat me and be done with it.”

Hannibal's arms get even tighter, if it's possible. "Never."

---

They don't fight in the battle. Not directly, anyways, because Will has no idea how to fight and Hannibal only picks off stragglers at a distance because of course his archery is excellent. Will doesn't mind so much though, because Hannibal adopts the battle armor of his kin and by that he means that Hannibal basically shoots bare-chested with only a quiver strapped round his back and Will has no objection to that.

Afterwards, when the battle is over and the ice has fully retreated and the coronation is done, Aslan approaches them from where Hannibal and Will are lying on the floor, Will curled up against Hannibal's flanks.

"I am sorry for what you have suffered," Aslan says sincerely. "But I can offer you something, at least."

Will hides a yawn and is comforted by Hannibal's steady hand on his back. It's still a teeny bit unnerving to face an enormous lion though. "Which is?"

Aslan blinks calmly, tail swishing. "I can bring you home. Exactly as it was when you left, for time moves different between universes."

"Or?" Hannibal prompts.

"Or you may remain here, and attempt to make what life you can. It's your choice."

Will looks at Hannibal, who only looks back, stoic as ever. He thinks he's already made his choice.

When he looks back, Aslan has vanished.

"Um."

"Yes, legend does say he has a habit of that."

"So you're willing to put up with me for the rest of our days?"

"Oh, my Will," Hannibal says, and somehow he manages to curl even further around Will, eyes so dark Will feels like he's falling down into a deep, dark hole he has no desire to climb out of, "I will never let you go as long as I draw breath."

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Tomorrow's prompt is "Eggnog" and we shall be returning to a cutesy alternate meeting. If the muse cooperates of course. See you then!

# Eggnog

Chapter Summary

No one believes it, but they do actually meet because Will had an allergic reaction to some spiked eggnog.

Chapter Notes

Hah! For once my muse didn't distract me and we did get a cutesy alternate meeting as promised.

Warnings: casual discussion of dead people. Not much else.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In the future, whenever anyone asks how they got together, the story is never the same. This is for several reasons.

First and foremost is that it depends on what mood Will is in when the question is asked. If he's grumpy, they get a very short, "Hannibal stuck needles in me." If Will is feeling playful, they get a flirtatious, "Hannibal felt me up." And if Will is feeling bored, he just makes up the most outrageous story he can on the spot with whatever he can see or is holding.

Secondly, it depends who is asking and how. The snootier the asker, for example, the more elaborate Will makes it, waxing on in glorious detail about Hannibal had heroically saved Will from a burning building and carried him single-handedly to a hospital and operated on him for hours and hours and hours until at last, nearly dead on his feet, Hannibal had saved Will's life. If, on the other hand, Beverly starts asking, Will merely hides his face in the nearest part of Hannibal he can reach. Mostly this ends up with Will attached to Hannibal's back or chest, but this has also resulted in some very interesting situations, such as when Will was sprawled out on the floor and Hannibal was seated primly in a chair, and Will had immediately buried his face in Hannibal's lap and refused to come back up for air for the remainder of the night.

Thirdly, and most importantly, it depends on how drunk Will is at the time. If he's only a few drinks in, a blush and quick retreat to Hannibal's side is normal. However, if he's quite drunk, they are treated to the rare sight of Will Graham unabashedly making eye contact and waving his hands all over the place as he slurs his way through praising Hannibal's eyes and face and hands and chest and legs and butt and hair and really, all of him, until at last Hannibal notices and cuts him off.

In reality, though, the answer is really simple: they meet in a hospital, as a doctor and patient, and it was because Will had managed to drink the one cup of spiked eggnog to which he was allergic to.

Will still claims the story isn't as exciting as his creations though.

---

The first time Hannibal sees Will, he honestly doesn't think too much of him. Mostly, this can be forgiven, as Hannibal first sees Will unconscious and covered with an oxygen mask, so really he sees nothing but a mass of chocolate curls and oversized flannel shirt and wrinkled jeans. It's also not exactly the most peaceful night in the ER, so one student with an allergic reaction is nothing compared to the laundry list of people who come in with gunshot wounds and overdoses and random minor complaints.

So really, the first time they truly meet is the day afterwards, when Will has woken up and Hannibal comes in to assess his mental state.

Considering that Will never once says anything but monosyllabic answers and Hannibal is tired from a very long shift, neither really remember that first meeting particularly well, no matter what Hannibal says.

No, the really interesting part comes later.

---

"Patient 268D is *such* a prick."

"What, blue eyes and curls? He's such a sweetheart!"

"What are you talking about? He's the rudest patient I've ever met."

"I can barely get him to talk to be honest."

The discussions pique Hannibal's interest not because of the subject, but the speakers. The nurse bemoaning Will Graham's attitude is one of the rudest people Hannibal's ever met, and he's already saved her business card in his rolodex for a later meal. On the other hand, the nurse sighing over his sweetness is truly one of the nicest coworkers Hannibal's ever had, and he's already invited her to dinner twice.

And well, Hannibal's heard theories of empathy but he's never seen it, and honestly, he figures it won't hurt to try some experiments of his own.

True to form, when he comes in stern and stoic, Will is stern and stoic back, barely talking and never moving his eyes from the ceiling. When he comes in slightly anxious and constantly checking his watch, Will is the twitchiest man alive, fidgeting underneath his blanket and shredding his napkin into tinier and tinier pieces. And when he comes in soft and gentle, Will softens and gentles too, until he's more of a giant marshmallow than a human.

It's entirely fascinating and Hannibal finds himself cataloguing Will's quirks, because every time he thinks he's discovered something completely and totally unique to Will, he realizes

that it's just a watered down version that Will's absorbed.

*Who are you, Will Graham?* Hannibal wonders.

Then comes the day that Hannibal walks in on Will with a visitor and it's the most dramatic shift yet. The visitor is Alana, who is sweetness and kindness, and Will is his twitchy, morbid-humor, awkward self when she is present, but the second she leaves and Hannibal fills the room, Will unwinds, just a little, until finally he is more relaxed and more open, as Hannibal is now that he has so many more questions.

"Doctor Lecter, right?"

Hannibal turns back to Will. "Yes?"

"You're playing mind games with me and I want to know why."

"Why on earth would I do that?"

Will smiles, but the smile is full of sharp wolf-teeth, and for a moment Hannibal breathes in the adrenaline rush of standing in the presence of a fellow predator, even if that predator is still young and untried. "My empathy isn't just about reflecting people," he says pointedly. "It's understanding them and what they do and most importantly, why."

And, well, the game is up.

"Ah," Hannibal says. "So that is why you allowed me eye contact yesterday." *Clever boy.*

"So we understand each other. Good. Knock off the mind games or I'll have you fired."

Hannibal has to smile at that. Will Graham may one day be a wolf to rival all others, but for now his claws are still growing in and his fur is mostly soft baby fuzz around his ears. Hannibal has already won several alpha fights. He feels no threat from this pup. "And how would you accomplish such a momentous task?"

"You really want to find out?"

The blips of Will's heart rate monitor are steady. He is not bluffing.

"Very well," Hannibal concedes.

Just as Will starts to relax, though, Hannibal leans over him and takes a long, dedicated inhale of Will's scent. Even after a few nights in the hospital, Hannibal can still smell the panic and the eggnog and the perfume of those who surrounded him. He smells delightful and also . . . rather strange. Like sweet flowers set on fire, if Hannibal was being metaphorical.

Will swallows below him. "Um. Personal space, creeper." His voice is steady, but he smells like fear and behind them, his heart rate monitor beeps a little faster.

Hannibal withdraws. His point has been made. This pup needs stronger teeth first, before he might try it on Hannibal's well-developed person suit.

He inclines his head. “Good day, Will Graham.”

---

Later, Hannibal will request Will’s full medical file, and the information therein – while not conclusive – will support his suspicions. And therein Hannibal is faced with a dilemma: to watch that beautiful boy and his gorgeous mind burn up, or to intervene and leave his caterpillar stunted for the effort.

Hannibal flips a coin, and when it lands he accepts the outcome.

Will Graham will not burn in the fires of encephalitis. Not this time, at least.

---

Later, dizzy from treatment, Will squints at him from his bed and rasps, “Doctor Lecter.”

“Will.”

“What changed your mind?”

“Well, you seemed highly resistant to the idea of allowing a nurse to bathe you, but you are too weak to bathe yourself, so this seemed like the next best compromise.”

“ . . . What? No, not that.”

Hannibal pauses from where he’s got the bath filling up. Will does truly smell a little ripe, but the overpowering natural scent of Will is far better than the strong smell of antiseptics and dog fur, so mostly Hannibal isn’t very bothered by it. Will is fiercely independent though, so he’s insisted on a bath.

“Then?”

Will gives him a long look. “You weren’t sure about it. Treating me for the . . . that thing I had. What changed your mind?”

“I’m a doctor. It’s my duty to treat patients.”

Will rolls his eyes so hard that he actually rolls his entire head. Mostly because the treatment makes him weak, but also because he can be a tad dramatic when Hannibal lets his person suit show too much. “You don’t give a damn about your patients, Doctor Lecter. You care about your reputation and your fun and your games. So why wasn’t I a game? I could’ve been your pet empathy, high on brain fumes and hallucinations.”

Hannibal is silent for a long moment. Then he says, “I flipped a coin. It landed heads up.”

“Are you serious?”

“You tell me, my pet empath.”

“I will roll my wheelchair over your toes.”

“You are more than welcome to try.”

Will does try, but his hand-eye coordination is still a little lacking so in reality he just runs over the shadow of Hannibal’s toes. Hannibal is his normal graceful self and helps Will bathe without comment.

And then, just as Hannibal is about to lift Will out to dry, Will lolls his head back in the tub and whispers, “I know what’s under your person suit.”

Hannibal freezes. It’s not a conscious reaction, but more of a self-preserving one. In the three seconds between his reaction and Will speaking again, he’s already calculated six ways to kill Will without anyone being suspicious, most of which will allow him to be cast as the victim.

“Don’t worry,” Will mutters drowsily. “No one’s going to believe me. ‘sides, I think it’s kind of . . . beautiful.”

“Most would disagree, and quite vehemently.”

“Yeah, but you make – help – damn it what’s the word . . . oh! Elevate them. That. You do that to them. And stuff. And it’s mostly pretty. Even if there’s a lot of blood.” Will closes his eyes. “I’m tired. Can I sleep now?”

Hannibal pets Will’s curls, and for once it has nothing to do with Will as his patient. “Yes, you may,” he says softly, and he smiles.

---

Much later, Hannibal proposes over a glass of eggnog, which is fortunate since Will’s slightly buzzed already and if he didn’t dislike eggnog with a ferocity that belies his allergic reaction, Will might have drank it all down and missed what Hannibal was saying.

Will still maintains that he meant his “yes” when he wakes up in a more sober state, though, so all’s well that ends well.

Beverly, for her part, still doesn’t believe the story even when Alana confirms it.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

> The prompt for Day 6 is "holiday cards" and my story will either involve something I'll make up on the spot or an interesting movie trailer I saw before Fantastic Beasts & Where To Find Them. Either way, see you then!

# Holiday Cards

Chapter Summary

When Will writes a nasty holiday card to Revenge, he really does not expect a guy in a suit to turn up in his room.

Chapter Notes

Aaaaand we revisit another Percy Jackson mishmash! (Can you tell I adore Rick Riordan's work?)

Warnings: some morbid jokes about eating people, but that's it

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For Will, the tradition starts after his father, drunk and angry, reveals the secret that so many children learn the hard way: that Santa isn't real. Will learns that day how many hard-won and long-labored-over letters were tossed into the fire for fuel by his uncaring father, and after that day, he is forever changed in a way not many children are.

This because Will, unlike so many other children, doesn't stop writing.

Well, he does stop writing to Santa.

But he does not stop writing to everything else. Will writes to Wind, one day when he's so sick he has to stay home from school and spends the day watching the wind blow leaves from the trees, strong and then fading and the strong again, whistling against the bricks of his house. Will writes to Time, one day after another very long cross country roadtrip that his father swears will be *the last one, Willy, we're definitely going to stay here and put down roots, I've got great feelings about this job.* Will writes to Lightning, one day when he sees a great tree split down the middle by a bolt. Will writes to Winter, one day when snow comes too early and school is cancelled and everyone seems so excited.

His father scorns the practice, but unlike Santa, he cannot truly claim that Winter does not exist, that Lightning does not exist, that Wind does not exist. And if anything, his father's disapproval makes Will more determined to write.

His letters do grow less constant as he grows up though. Science classes and life lessons answer a lot of the questions he'd originally written about, and his classes and his jobs also swallow a great deal he used to spend letter writing. Still, he faithfully sends out a letter at

least once a month, and each time he marvels that he still has not run out of Things to write to.

Then one cold winter day, Will is shot by a man seeking revenge for Will interfering, and Will, drugged up on meds and also rather irritated, instead of writing a letter drops a holiday card into the mailbox.

It reads, rather simply, *Dear Revenge: Screw you.*

The next morning, Will wakes up to find an elegantly dressed man sitting cross-legged in his room.

“Um . . . who are you?”

The man closes the book in his hand with a snap. He’s wearing a very finely tailored three-piece suit, all bold lines of red and black, including a very sharp looking pocket square. His shoes gleam like brand new, every single hair is slicked back into place, and his watch is ornate in its simplicity. Still, the most striking features to Will are his cheekbones and his eyes.

Or, rather, his *eye.*

The other eye is foggy and milk-white, and actually most of the left side of his face is marred by a single but deep scar that runs from his forehead through his blinded eye and then down to his angled cheekbone.

“Hello, Will Graham,” says the man. “I believe you wrote to me?”

Will blinks blankly at the stranger. His face draws no recognition in Will’s memory, but his voice is so striking that it makes Will even more certain he doesn’t know this man. He’d remember that voice.

The man smiles and pulls out a small red and gold card from his pocket, which he carefully slides to Will.

It’s Will’s holiday card to Revenge.

Will looks up. Catalogues the man’s face. Looks back down at the card. “Revenge is . . . a middle-aged European man with one eye?” Will asks skeptically.

“I prefer the name Nemesis, actually.”

“ . . . Okay. Still.”

The man switches his legs, although miraculously not a single line in his suit is ruined by this. Will sort of envies him. “Nemesis is . . . a title, of sorts. As times changed and beings evolved, so did we. Even the ancient ones are not immune to . . . adapting and changing, as it were.”

“So . . . Nemesis . . . *became* a middle-aged European with one eye?”

“Oh, no, Nemesis herself took the eye from me as payment. Then she passed on the title. And now I am Nemesis.”

Will puts his head back and closes his eyes, because damn, these drugs must be really, really, really strong. “Ooookay, brain, you’ve had quite enough now,” he tells himself. “Time to wake up.”

“Oh, William Shannon Graham,” says Nemesis, “I’m afraid you are already awake.”

---

After a few more arguments and conversations, it turns out that the Greek gods – or, well, the gods, but with the names Will remembers from Greek mythology – are sometimes still alive. Their powers and strength are determined by who remembers them and who needs them, and Nemesis rightly points out that revenge is needed and celebrated in many forms, in every language and culture and society on the planet. So Nemesis has endured, whereas many of his counterparts have largely faded into obscurity.

Nemesis is also, as it turns out, really fond of spouting off really random facts and metaphors and old poetry, especially when Will starts going to physical therapy and he starts going off about some hero he cursed into a flower or something.

“Really? Don’t you – have anything – better to do?” Will pants, struggling to lift the weights designed to get his shoulder back into some semblance of normality.

Nemesis cocks his head. “Move your left foot there and your other arm there,” he instructs. “Otherwise you will throw yourself off balance and tire more easily. Yes. Like that. Now go again.”

“What, are you my doctor now?”

Nemesis goes quiet, at that, until eventually he murmurs, “I was a doctor. Once.”

The silence makes Will uneasy, mostly because the last time Nemesis went silent it was after a nurse mocked Will for spilling some water. Nemesis had made some sort of gesture, and the next time Will saw the nurse, it was when other nurses rushed the person past his door shouting about a massive car accident. Nemesis does not play around.

“Why me?” Will asks, and he never quite gets a straight answer.

One day, Nemesis says that it’s because Will’s pain entertains him. Another day, Nemesis says that it’s because a hospital is a prime place to meet and punish the rude and mighty.

However, he also jokes about turning people in stew, so Will doesn’t take him seriously most of the time.

Or.

Well, Will hopes it’s a joke.

Finally, it all comes to head one day when Nemesis scares the living daylights out of Will by teleporting into his bathroom whilst Will is attempting to shower. Will promptly nearly slips and dies, and his immediate follow-up instinct is to punch Nemesis in the face, which sends the man reeling backwards into the wall.

“Um. I thought you were a god,” Will says, eyeing the man where his lip has torn and golden ichor weeps.

Nemesis licks his lip and the cut heals, but the gleam in his eyes is so bizarre Will takes extra time wrapping the towel completely around his naked, bare, vulnerable human body. It’s almost like he *enjoyed* being struck by Will.

Then Nemesis says, “That is why I came to you, Will. Not because you had the idea or the bravery to challenge my judgment, but because you hurt me.”

“What did I do?”

Nemesis carefully shakes back his sleeves and holds out his arms. For a moment, Will is distracted by long, glowing blue swirls, like tattoos that just keep moving around, but then Will is distracted by the sight of two long, shaky scars, as if someone had dragged a knife over his forearms just to make him scream. There’s also a smaller, faded slice in the palm of his hand, almost like –

“A paper cut, yes,” Nemesis says when he notices Will’s gaze. “I took your card in my hand as I plucked it from the wind, and it cut my hand open. I have not felt pain in so many years, and I was intrigued.”

“So you decided to mutilate your arms?!”

“I was curious.”

Will sighs. “And here I thought you being a god was weird enough.”

“I can heal the scars if I truly wish.”

Will doesn’t even need his empathy to know the undercurrent of that sentence is, *But I do not want to.*

“It is my sacred duty to tear down the proud and the powerful and the rude,” Nemesis intones quietly, folding his sleeves back down. “I bring them fear, I bring them ruin, and I bring them pain. Yet you are the only one who has managed to bring *me* pain. It makes me wonder if I might have my own personal Nemesis standing right in front of me.”

“I’m not a god.”

“But you could be.”

“Pass, Nemesis.”

“I think,” he says with a sigh, “that you had better start calling me Hannibal.”

Hannibal doesn't stick around for too long after that. He waxes on and on about some big war that he must participate in because some giants or something are causing havoc, and Will zones out about two minutes in so Hannibal just smiles, kisses him gently on the forehead, and gives him a single last piece of advice.

"If you need me, call for me," Hannibal says. "I will come."

Will all but forgets about this promise in the next years that are filled with pain and regret and struggle as he claws his way into the FBI Academy and his arrangement with Jack Crawford, but then one day he kicks down the door of a cannibalistic serial killer and shoots the man only to see his daughter dying on the floor, and Will's first thought is, *This is not balance.*

"Hannibal!" he shouts, struggling to contain the blood flow as the girl whimpers beneath him.

Hannibal appears like a ghost coming into focus, a huge black form of fire and blood and antlers that slowly coalesces into his elegantly suited, one-eyed form. He kneels beside Will, but the blood flows neatly around him and does not seem disturbed.

"Will," he says, sounding pleased. "It's lovely to see you again."

"You said you'd help!"

"Yes," Hannibal agrees. "But I said I would come to help *you*, sweet William, not anyone else."

Will snaps at him. "Help me by helping her, or so help me god I will punch you again!"

Hannibal's eyes gleam, mostly because he's a weirdo about Will drawing blood but also because he's actually starting to glow, like a true god, incandescent and blinding. "Well," Hannibal says, voice echoing so loud it makes Will's ears ring painfully, "how could I possibly refuse such an offer?"

Will does punch him.

Hannibal repays him with a slice to the gut that burns like fire.

---

Will wakes up afterward, head heavy and eyes dazed, to find himself exactly as he was when Hannibal and him first met – in a hospital, tucked under heavy sheets in a hospital, with Hannibal reading a book at his side, handsome face blank and stoic.

"What did you do to me?" Will croaks.

"I am the god of balance and justice, not favors, Will. I took my price to save the girl."

Will prods gingerly at his belly, which still burns at the touch. It's going to be a hell of a scar, assuming Will manages to retain all of his essential organs, of course. "You couldn't have just asked?"

Hannibal gives him a look that's halfway between amused and annoyed. Will's rather missed his expressive, conflicting looks.

"Justice does not ask. It merely is." Hannibal shifts in his seat. "I took your death in exchange for her life. I thought it was a fitting punishment."

"What . . . does that mean?"

Hannibal kisses him on the forehead, sweet and gentle, and it burns like the fire in Will's belly, but a gentle fire, warming and soothing. It's almost like stepping into the center of a bonfire, if only one could not be burnt, which Will supposes Hannibal truly cannot be.

"It means," Hannibal whispers, "welcome to immortality, my sweet Will."

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Tomorrow's prompt for Day 7 is "Eskimo Kisses"! It may also involve an animal!AU, similar to my Bambi!AU or my dragon!AU from Hannictober. Depends on the muse, as usual. See you then!

Also, while this story does draw most of its roots from Percy Jackson, the eye-thing is borrowed from Mads's role in "Valhalla Rising" because Nemesis does take an eye from someone in Percy Jackson and I figured it was only fitting to use Mads's appearance where he is literally a character called "One-Eye". The second thing I drew inspiration from was this trailer for "Collateral Beauty", which really struck me as an interesting idea when it played and I forgot to hit the skip ad button.

# Eskimo Kisses

Chapter Summary

> One day, the swan shed its cloak of feathers and made its way over to the man-who-was-not-a-man and said, "Why do you not swim with us, cousin-of-the-great-waters?" And the man-who-was-not-a-man said, "I cannot."

Chapter Notes

> Warnings: interspecies romance I guess if that bothers you? There's no smut though.
>
> This story was inspired by this tumblr post about selkies and swans, because it made me laugh, and then it made me think of Hannibal. And also because All I Need Is A Stream by toffeecape is one of my most favorite stories ever.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There once was a little pond in the central of a large park that was connected by a river to the great ocean. And this pond was very gentle and warm, so it was favored by humans and shifters alike – the humans, for the safe shallow edges, and the shifters, for the deep and sheltering middle. And around this pond were scattered benches, green as grass and solid as stone.

One particular bench was favored by what would appear to any human as a young man in a flannel shirt and jeans, curly-haired and blue-eyed, brooding. He came every single Thursday, like clockwork, to sit and stare across the pond with eyes far away from his human shell.

And eventually, the other shifters noticed.

The squirrel shifters chittered at him as they passed, and the bird shifters chirped and sung to him, and the ducks shifters honked, and for the most part, they left him in peace.

The swan, though, did no such thing.

The swan was a magnificent creature, with a wingspan large enough to swallow a person whole and then some, and its proud neck and gleaming white feathers drew man admiring humans to toss bread crumbs in hopes of drawing him nearer to take photographs. The swan ignored them all; what use had a swan for human food and human photographs? He was the king of the pond, and no one dared to challenge him.

The swan knew every person in his domain, and that included the man-who-was-not-a-man on the bench.

Yet the man-who-was-not-a-man never intruded on his territory or made any challenges or patronized him, so the swan left him be. Until, that is, the seasons turned, and as the snow melted and the leaves returned and the humans broke out the towels and the picnic baskets with sumptuous crumbs and leftovers.

The swan noticed, as they all did, that the man-who-was-not-a-man never left the bench, although he eyed the waters with great longing. He never wore anything less than a full jacket over his flannel shirt and full length jeans either, despite the fact that he must be sweltering under the heat. Yet he never came within more than ten feet of the waters, even though when he stood and left it was always with multiple glances back.

So, finally, one day, early in the morning, the swan shed his skin of feathers for his two-legged skin and waited for the sun to rise.

The man-who-was-not-a-man came, as usual, right on the dot and sat on the bench, and the swan's sharp eyes noticed the limp in his leg and the way he so carefully sat, as though every movement pained him.

The swan said, "May I sit here?"

The man-who-was-not-a-man grunted. "Do what you like, I don't care."

"Thank you," said the swan politely.

The sun moved across the sky, and the swan sat there and closed his eyes and breathed. Other humans might call it meditation, but the swan did not meditate. He thought.

And he took a deep breath, and as the wind shifted, the swan caught some of the scent of the man-who-was-not-a-man, and against his will he felt his eyes widen slightly. The man-who-was-not-a-man smelt *divine* – like roaring waves and salty water and fresh fish, and underneath it all was the recognition *cousin kin family*.

So the swan said, "Why do you not shed this human skin for your own skin, cousin-of-the-great-waters?"

The man-who-was-not-a-man blinked in shock. Perhaps no one had spoken to him in a long time, the swan thought. From the way he rolled his tongue in his mouth and how slowly the words tumbled out, maybe it was truer than he predicted.

"I . . . I can't."

"This pond is shared by many creatures," said the swan. "You have not harmed any of our number. We would welcome you to swim among us."

"No, I can't."

The swan eyed the man-who-was-not-a-man. Perhaps this one was a child, born on shore and bereft of guidance. In that case, it behooved the swan to take the man-who-was-not-a-man under his wing. They might wear different forms, but at the heart they were all the same, and the swan thought it a tragedy to deprive the waters of whatever glorious creature this man-who-was-not-a-man might be, in his true skin.

“Why not?”

The man-who-was-not-a-man turned red at that, ducking his head. It was a human gesture, the swan had learned, signifying embarrassment and shame, like when one gets one’s foot stuck in a weed and screeches for help only to realize that a few beats of powerful wings will get one free again.

“If you cannot swim,” said the swan, “it would be my pleasure to teach you.”

The man-who-was-not-a-man snarled. “I can’t swim because I *literally* can’t! A human stole my skin, a long time ago when I was a child, and my mother left me to save herself. If I were to go into the water, I would surely drown.”

The swan stared. Certainly, the swan had had heard stories, back in the old days, of kith and kin snatched from the waves and the shores, bound into servitude and human bondage, but most days the cygnets were guarded quite jealously. Even a rival would rather guard a cygnet than let the poor thing fall into human hands, cold, waterless, naked human hands.

The man-who-was-not-a-man seemed not to notice the swan’s swelling rage. “Although,” said the man-who-was-not-a-man thoughtfully, “maybe it would be preferable to my life now. . .”

The swan said, “Who. Took. Your. Skin.”

“And what exactly are *you* going to do about, cousin-of-the-calm-waters?” the man-who-was-not-a-man shot back.

The swan bared his human teeth, sharp and flat and strange as they were in human form, and let his true eyes bleed through his human skin. They were red as the blood of humans and fierce, as their ancestors once were.

The man-who-was-not-a-man’s mouth fell open in shock.

“Now,” said the swan, settling back into place, “tell me: who took your skin?”

---

Doctor Matthew Brown was a well-acclaimed doctor, having published many well-received studies on seals. He claimed that he had a secret in his house, a magical one, and many laughed at his cheek, although no one noticed the hidden trapdoor in his wine cellar during all the parties he threw.

One morning, the doorbell rang, and Doctor Brown opened the door to see a beautiful swan standing there.

“Well, well. Who am I to refuse when dinner comes of its own will?” said Doctor Brown with glee, and let the swan inside.

The police came after two days, when Doctor Brown did not show up to work. The front foyer was splattered with blood, and there was no trace of Doctor Brown, his nervous husband, or the killer who left pristine white feathers all over the crime scene.

---

“You know, I really don’t think this is the best idea,” Will said, eyeing the waves like they might bite him.

Hannibal, who was patiently standing in the waist-high water, merely persisted in holding out his hand. In human form, he was as handsome to Will’s sense as his swan self was to Will’s seal self, rugged and strong and ruthless, everything that Will – who had known no life but a tiny basement cell with a kiddie pool and 12 hours of “freedom” once a week and daily humiliations – desired most strongly.

“You and I are kin,” said Hannibal. “You will remember how.”

Will swallowed and set first one foot in the pool, and then another. The pool belonged to a human house that Hannibal owned under an alias, since apparently sometimes he enjoyed returning to humanity just for the hell of it, and he had been taking full advantage of the enclosed and private indoor pool to gently nudge, prompt, and pull Will into relearning what being a shifter meant.

The water was warm, and Will found himself sinking down, eyes closed with pleasure, before he even realized it.

“It feels so nice,” Will sighed.

Hannibal smiled and retrieved Will’s fur skin from the side of the pool. He had broken every single lock in Brown’s house until he had finally found it, and since then he had personally carried it everywhere with him. Mostly this was because Will was still too frightened and confused on how to use it, but also it was because he enjoyed the way Will shivered with pleasure at Hannibal’s familiar touch on his most precious of belongings.

Hannibal put his arms around Will and draped the fur skin solemnly over his shoulders. “Now, my Will,” he said, “breathe. Remember. You are so much more than this . . . human skin.”

Will clutched at the skin when Hannibal pulled back. The fur felt both sleek and heavy with water, liable to slip off at the slightest movement. It in no way made him feel worthy of the shifter title, not compared to Hannibal’s gorgeous cloak of white feathers and the seamless way he could sling his cloak round his broad shoulders and blur seamlessly into his swan form.

“I don’t feel like it.”

Hannibal smiled. “Think of the sea, Will. Think of the waves and the rocks and the sand. Think of the fish.”

Maybe it was Hannibal talking about the water, or maybe it was the memory of the delightful fish dish Hannibal had so lovingly prepared, or maybe it was just the calm guidance of Hannibal’s voice, but either way, Will took a deep breath, and from one moment to the next his entire world changed, like he had suddenly flipped his entire body around in a complete circle and made himself dizzy.

“Hannibal!” he said, except it comes out as incomprehensible barking seal noises.

Hannibal grinned wide and unabashed, and Will immediately took to the water, amazed at how easily it was to fly through it, so much faster and more natural than running on land had been, and soon he’s zipped around Hannibal so many times that the swan no longer tried to turn but simply smiled and watched.

Finally, though, Will slowed and came up lazily to Hannibal, who stroked his skin with a fond smile.

“I knew you could do it,” Hannibal said.

Will barked a seal laugh and nudged his nose against Hannibal’s, an expression of all of the gratitude and joy and sheer *love* that no words, in human or shifter languages, could ever convey. It didn’t really matter though. From the way Hannibal’s smile softened and the way he stroked Will’s skin, fond and protective and possessive, Will knew that Hannibal had gotten the message.

---

The swan of the pond became even more famous over the summer. Every week, almost like clockwork, a seal swam up from the ocean and enthusiastically followed the swan around, barking and laughing and in generally having a great deal of the fun. The swan put up with all the displays of sound and splashing with dignity, but even casual viewers could see the way the swan nudged its beak against the seal’s nose.

Sometimes, though, the swan did not appear, and neither did on the seal.

And sometimes, on those days, a man in an elegant three-piece suit and a sketchbook would appear and sit on the same bench that once was the home for a brooding man-that-was-not-a-man, and he would sketch and wait and sketch until, finally, when the sun was high, a young man in lilac shorts would emerge from the waters, grinning and soaked. He would make a beeline straight for the suited man and oftentimes smother him in kisses and water until, at last, the suited man would produce a fluffy blue towel and lovingly dry the other man.

Together, the suited man and the swimsuit man drew the admiring eye of many a visitor, and more than once, they were caught nudging noses, and sometimes it was more intimate for many to see them giving each other eskimo kisses than to see them actually kissing.

Either way, as soon as the sun drew near the horizon, the suited man would pull the yawning swimsuit man to his feet and bear him away, sometimes merely leading him by the hand and

other times by sweeping him up and carrying him away like a conquering Viking and his precious prize, and they would leave the park, smiling and lost in each other’s eyes.

And they lived, by many accounts, happily ever after.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

And, well, since this story is late . . . today's prompt for Day 8 is "Christmas Lights". The ficlet will come out in a few hours, and I'm gonna make my best attempt at a kids!AU. See you then!

Also if some of the tenses are wrong, it's because I haven't written in past tense for a long time so I kept switching instinctively back to present tense. Any corrections are welcomed because I have no beta and am also bad at editing :D

# Christmas Lights

Chapter Summary

Funnily enough, of all things, it’s a middle school play that brings them together.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: um I got nothing. I think this one is in the clear. Except for the fact that I'm really bad at writing kids, so Hannibal and Will are probably WAAAAY too mature but oh well

Also totally ignore canon, ain't nothing in here gonna match up with Hannibal's backstory. My bad.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Funnily enough, of all things, it’s a middle school play that brings them together.

---

When Will first gets shoved into the drama teacher’s office, he’s so embarrassed and annoyed that he actually doesn’t realize that he’s not alone in sulking in the office until he finally looks up five minutes later. There’s another boy sitting in the chair next to him, and Will immediately sits back because everything about this boy radiates *cold* and *danger*, like the deadliest mix of frostbite condensed into a human.

The boy turns his head ever so slightly, flicks his eyes from Will’s toes to his head, and then turns his head back, sizing up and dismissing Will within a two second span.

Will swallows heavily, feeling rather like a rabbit a lion has decided isn’t worth the effort to chase down, and crosses his arms.

The drama teacher, when she finally comes in, sighs. “So . . . you’re Will,” she says, and Will nods.

“Which makes you . . . Hannibal?”

The boy lowers his chin just the slightest, as if he doesn’t want to waste any energy on useless motions.

“Okay, boys,” the teacher sighs, pushing some hair out of her face in a way that spells *weary Adult*. “So here’s the thing. Hannibal, *you* have been ordered to get some extracurricular

classes because everyone wants to say that you got a ‘well rounded education’ here in America. And Will, *you* have been ordered to get extracurricular classes because honestly your class list up to this point is more of what you haven’t taken rather than what you have. And the school administrators, in their infinite wisdom, have given you two to me, since drama class is drama class and we have a big play coming up.

“But. From what I can tell, Will here has no interest in learning a lot of lines in two days, and Hannibal, you haven’t said a word since you were dropped off. So here’s my compromise, and you’ll take it or leave it.”

Considering that she is the only Adult who has spoken to them like people who can hear and think, Will sees Hannibal leaning forward, perhaps despite himself, the same way Will himself is. She’s right on point, Will does have no interest in learning any lines or speaking in any play, and although Will doesn’t know Hannibal, silent and refusing to speak would fit in pretty well with his frostbite vibe.

When she tells them what she has in mind, Will isn’t sure if it’s a blessing or not.

---

Hannibal and Will, as the newest kids in the class four days before the play’s big show, get the amazing roles of . . . Christmas lights.

Will actually lets out a sigh of his own when he sees the costume. White pants and white shirt, hastily wrapped in rainbow stripes of ribbons to simulate sparkling lights, and they’re so last minute that their parts are scribbled into the script amounting to “stand still and say nothing”.

Hannibal has an even better reaction though. While his face doesn’t really move – because, again, frozen to go with frostbite – his nostrils flare and his eyes narrow just the tiniest bit, and Will is caught between the desire to laugh at the clear displeasure of the boy who can’t be unnerved and his empathetic sense of pure *disgust* that radiates from Hannibal’s every pore.

Hannibal gives him a Look.

Will quickly hides in the next room to change.

---

The first recital is honestly quite boring. Hannibal and Will sit in front of the fake Christmas tree cut out, wave a few ribbons, and just really sit there, bored. No one bothers them because no one really notices or cares, and because they’re all too worried about their own parts.

Second recital, Will actually falls asleep mid-practice, and when he wakes up, it’s because Hannibal gently but firmly slips out from under him and the jolt triggers Will back to awakening only to realize that he literally slept through the last hour using Hannibal as his full on body-pillow.

This time, it’s Hannibal’s turn to hide in the next room while changing.

Third recital, it's Hannibal's turn to stare at him like a hawk because Will's stomach keeps growling. Will spends most of that recital shuffling uncomfortably and staring down at the floor, because his dad spent the last of his paycheck on alcohol and Will ate the last of the mac'n'cheese for breakfast.

That's when, for the first time, Hannibal makes eye contact with him.

Will has just finished changing and is busy rubbing his stomach in the hopes of quieting the rumblings when a small Tupperware container lands in his lap, startling him so much he nearly drops it.

When he looks up, Hannibal mimes opening the tin.

"Um . . . No, I'm good?"

Hannibal gives him a Look.

Will hastily says, "Um, sure, thanks, but uh . . . what is it?"

Hannibal blinks at him, and then starts making a series of complex gestures that makes Will's head spin. Even his empathy is no use, because Hannibal is thinking about it so passionately that it throws Will right back out, having only gotten glimpses of some kind of meat and some kind of berries. So Will does the expedient thing, cracks it open, and takes a great big whiff.

"Chicken soup!" Will exclaims, because if there's anything that spells comfort food for him it's chicken soup, so easily cobbled together from almost anything and definitely warming in the stomach.

Will slurps it down so fast that he only notices Hannibal's exasperation at his identification of the soup when he's finished and wiping his mouth.

"Well, I can't understand you, and it was definitely chicken soup."

Hannibal gives a definite shake of his head.

"Turkey soup?"

Hannibal sighs.

Still, the next day at lunch, Hannibal plops himself down next to Will and without saying anything hands over a thick ham-and-cheese sandwich before he settles into his own meal. Will swallows back tears and eats it, full of shame, but Hannibal's gaze is clear and cool, which helps. Hannibal thinks nothing of it, so it becomes easier for Will to shake off the shame, and eventually he chokes it all down and Hannibal gives him an approving nod.

"You better not be fattening me up for something," Will warns, and he's only half-joking because he's heard a *lot* of stranger danger lectures.

Hannibal doesn't say anything, but the way he pauses just *so* tells Will that Hannibal got the joke.

---

At recital number five, Will is changing into his costume when there's a thud and a shriek from the next room, and he runs over to find Hannibal, teeth bared in a snarl and mouth bloodied, facing off against five other boys. Two are on the floor and one is shaking out his fist, and they don't notice Will at all, but Will feels no pull to get a teacher.

Instinctively, he feels his own lips curl back to match Hannibal's snarl.

This is their fight.

"You mute freak!" spits one of the boys. "Go back home where you belong!"

Maybe it's the word "freak" or the word "home", but Will's anger goes through the roof and between one blink and the next he's sliding in front of Hannibal. "Hannibal's not a freak! Hannibal's my friend!"

The boys share a laugh. "Oh yeah? Great, the two freaks together."

Will's lip trembles involuntarily, and he can feel Hannibal tense at his back. Hannibal didn't really give a rat's arse about them insulting him, Will knows that, but Hannibal is also fiercely proud and he has some weird ideas about Will and especially Will being sort of his, and maybe it's him channeling Hannibal's anger or maybe it's his own – Will can't tell anymore, in the heat of moment, as they're so blurred together they're almost one – but Will steps forward and punches the bully so hard he falls flat to the ground and lays there, stunned.

Will smiles. "Still think I'm a freak?"

The boy leaps to his feet, seemingly stunned, but his eyes are more crazed than ever. "I'll show you freak!" he splutters, starting forward.

Hannibal makes the strangest noise then, like a deep snarl from the depths of his belly, and it's so inhuman it makes the hairs on Will's neck stand on end, to the point where he almost wants to roll on the floor and show Hannibal his throat and belly. For the other boys, it's even more visible; their faces drain of color and several take a few steps back.

Hannibal takes one step forward, fists clenched, and they scatter.

The rage drains from the room so fast Will drops like a stone and sits down, panting. He only comes back to himself when he feels Hannibal patting clumsily at his face, occasionally making strange inquisitive noises, like a big cat nudging a tiny kitten.

"I'm okay," Will says, because the petting is a little weird even for Hannibal. "You?"

Hannibal nods solemnly and rises to carefully dab away the blood on his mouth, not even wincing as he prods his split lip.

“Thanks,” Will tells him. He’s been beaten many times before, and he’s never felt like today, because Hannibal was like a fierce and unmovable wall behind him, unyielding and menacing, and Will feels like he could take anything the world could throw at him as long as Hannibal was at his back.

Hannibal blinks slowly at him, like a cat, and then opens his mouth and says, “Will.”

---

After that, they’re inseparable. Hannibal still doesn’t really talk, except for the occasional “Will”, but it’s truly amazing the range he can inject into a one syllable word. There’s an angry version when Will tries to turn down his food, there’s an exasperated version when Will forgets to his homework, there’s a fond version when Will nods off on top of him, and there’s even a version for which Will has no name, just an emotion so strong that it turns Hannibal into a giant nuzzling lap cat.

It’s okay though. Will can talk for the both of them.

And also they learn Morse code, which makes things real fun once Will realizes just how morbid Hannibal’s humor can be to match his own.

---

When they enter high school, they hit their series of rocky patches. First off, Hannibal starts speaking again, which makes Will feel rather like a useless lump no matter how many poems Hannibal discretely tucks into his lunches. Secondly, Hannibal comes of age and inherits some crazy old title and fortune, plus an uncle and aunt who apparently didn’t know he was alive and who turn up to bring him back to France for a visit.

Will spends most of those days desperately containing his yearning for Hannibal to just be his own again.

Finally, after graduation, Will buys a ticket to France and goes to surprise Hannibal.

Hannibal shuts the door in his face.

This, of course, is then rather negated when Will, moodily wandering around the streets and contemplating darker and darker scenarios given that he has no place to stay and no money and no plan and no Hannibal, comes across a really bloody scene and a *very* bloody Hannibal.

“Um,” Hannibal says, and Will would laugh at it being the first time he caught Hannibal off-guard except he’s too busy trying not to punch him.

---

Later, as they’re washing up from hiding the body, Hannibal says, “I . . . didn’t want you to have to choose.”

Will rolls his eyes. Between Hannibal and the law, it’s almost no choice at all. Hannibal’s been his entire world since he first gave Will the food that kept him starving and the

friendship that kept him from going off the deep end. So what if Hannibal sometimes murders people in back alleys?

Well. Okay maybe Will does have an objection to back alleys. Because they're dirty and gross and even Will has standards.

But.

"You kill people who deserve to be killed," Will says slowly. "And you elevate them. So what?"

"Will," Hannibal says, and just that, but it's that strange version again, the one Will has no words for, so full of unnamable emotion that it makes Hannibal a giant nuzzling cat who can't stop petting Will.

Will thinks it might, *might*, just be love.

So Will sighs and hugs Hannibal back and just says, "Yeah, I love you too, you great big dork."

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

The prompt for Day 9 is "Sledding"! I think we're gonna get another dose of cutesy fluff. Possible with shifters again. See you then!

# Sledding

Chapter Summary

"Little lamb," Hannibal says, "have you truly never gone sledding before?"

Chapter Notes

Warnings: uh . . . . I'm pretty sure nothing except fluff

This was inspired by this post, because Will would make the cutest lamb to go with scary wolf Hannibal.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will closes his eyes and takes a long, deep breath, trying to calm himself. He reminds himself that he's safe, that he's perfectly and completely safe. He reminds himself that people know exactly where he is and when he's supposed to return. And he reminds himself that there are other people – human and shifter – watching. He leans down, digs his toes into the snow, and prepares himself.

Except.

Except it doesn't really help when Hannibal's leaning so close to his back, breathing hot exhalations against his neck though.

Will shoves an elbow back. "Would you give me some space?"

Hannibal, because he's a prick, whuffs a laugh and leans even more forward, until his cold nose touches Will's neck in the one spot his overlapping set of hat, scarf, and jacket don't cover, making Will hunch over.

"Haaaaannnnibaaaal," Will whines.

There's a telltale shiver in the air, just a blur of air and reality warping, and then warm arms creep around Will's waist.

"Little lamb," Hannibal says, sounding far too amused and collected for someone who's pretty much butt naked in the snow, "have you truly never gone sledding before?"

Will snaps at his hand, which only makes him laugh. "Go get dressed before your toes fall off."

Hannibal shrugs his broad shoulders. In his defense, all shifters run fairly hot and Hannibal is a wolf, through and through. He probably runs warm enough to melt a little path back to their encampment, if he truly wants. Will, though, is bundled up under a shirt, a thermal shirt, a sweater, and a coat, because he's a sheep and sheep generally rely on their wool coats. Except Will doesn't have his wool coat, because he's a human right now and he refuses to take all of that off to change back.

"Lean down," Hannibal instructs. "Just relax. Push off and let the sled do the rest."

"Since when do you put your trust in inanimate objects?"

Hannibal's eyes gleam, and Will thinks back to the all-too-professional cooking kit he'd dragged out with them. He settles for shoving Hannibal until the wolf yelps, falling out of the cold plastic sled into the snow with a thump.

"Change or put on your clothes," Will says pointedly.

Hannibal snarls playfully at him and then shifts, his form blurring from a tan human to a massive black-furred wolf, tall enough that his shoulders almost come to Will's shoulders. His breath steams into the air as he shakes himself, sending snow flying everywhere.

Most lambs would be afraid.

Will is not.

Hannibal nudges at his face, huffing quietly, and Will hugs his neck, tangling his fingers into thick fur of his ruff.

They've been out in the wilderness for only a few days, but already Will can feel the wonders of fresh cold air and isolation. Shifters don't do well in enclosed, tiny environments, and after his hospitalization for his brain attempting to melt its way out of his head, Will had hated the idea of being under human buildings even more. Hannibal had quietly suggested a little cabin he "rented" (Will later found the deed and confirmed that Hannibal was a dirty liar) and the wooden homey feel had done wonders for Will's instincts. Even now, his favorite part is to lie amongst the enormous nest of blankets and pillows and doze, his wolf – two-legged or four-legged – the warmest and softest pillow of them all.

"Seriously," Will murmurs quietly, making the wolf's ears prick up, "thank you."

Hannibal licks his cheek, affection clear in every line of his body. One thing, at least, that they have in common is that their shifter instincts clamor very strongly for the protection and strength of numbers – Hannibal for a pack and Will for a flock. In the past, Will relied on dogs to make up his fluffy, lovable herd, but he isn't exactly going to say no to Hannibal, who's adopted Will somewhat in the same way Will's adopted stray puppies.

Hannibal nudges him again, so Will takes another deep breath and faces his true nemesis: the hill.

When they first arrived, Will had made the foolish mistake of mentioning something to the effect of wishing to have been able to go sledding down it as a child, to which Hannibal had produced a sled from somewhere and goaded him into sledding down as an adult. Will has spent most of the last thirty minutes wasting away time in a futile attempt to make Hannibal give up.

Really, he should now better. Hannibal's like a wolf with a bone – he *never* gives up.

"Okay," Will tells himself, "three, two, one and three quarters, one and a half – HANNIBAL!"

Over the roaring in his eyes, Will hears Hannibal howling up a storm of laughter, back from where he's given Will a massive shove and sent him barreling down the hill at breakneck speed, so fast Will clutches at the rope for dear life and yells curses that the wind carries away. At last Will rolls out and tumbles over and over and over until he settles in the snow, panting and heart racing, his sled somewhere behind him, staring up at the sky and wondering how many years Hannibal's shaved off his life this time.

He's in the middle of debating between ten and fifteen when a massive spray of snow lands on his face, and he bolts upright, spluttering, to find Hannibal splayed out beside him, tongue lolling, from where he's apparently sled down on four legs.

Will chucks a snowball at his face, and then another.

Hannibal eats the first one with an air of smugness only a wolf with legs splayed every which way and snow on his tail could.

He misses the second.

Will has exactly one second to enjoy his victory before he takes off running, a wolf hot on his tail.

---

Later, once it starts growing dark, Will clambers onto Hannibal's enormous back and lets the wolf bear him home, rumbling a comforting melody as he walks. It's calm and beautiful and quiet, and Will dozes on the back of the wolf who's declared himself protector of the lone lamb.

After dinner, they sprawl into the nest of pillows and blankets, and Hannibal, for once, stays human-shaped, so Will shamelessly makes his stomach into his pillow as he stares into the fire.

"I hope you can see that it was not so dreadful as you feared," Hannibal says, patiently combing through Will's hair, which is as tangled as any lamb's wool.

Will yawns. "I was scared, the first time. The second time was better."

Hannibal touches his neck, the vulnerable point he'd defended even when Will was unconscious, growling and snapping when anyone came near. He'd apologized when he came

round, but most of the staff had waved it off. He was a wolf, they said, and he had been protecting an injured packmate. It was normal.

Not, perhaps, normal for those packmates to be a sheep and a wolf, but Hannibal was respected and Will was a patient, so they got a pass.

“I would never let harm come to you. Even in play.”

He’s not lying. Even when they curl up in animal form or wrestle playfully, Hannibal always, always holds back, never unleashing the full power of his jaws or his sharp teeth. One time he gave Will a scratch and spent the rest of the day alternating between cooking endless amounts of sweets as apology bribes and following Will around like the world’s biggest, sorriest oversized puppy.

They don’t really need a rehash of that day, though, so Will settles for, “Tough. Fixing engines is messy.”

“But you are familiar with those tools and quite skilled. You are rarely injured.”

Will squints at Hannibal’s face. “Is this you or the wolf speaking?”

“Does it matter?”

Will thinks for a second. Then he shrugs. It really doesn’t matter. The wolf or the human in Hannibal, it really, really doesn’t matter, because they’ve willingly chosen to protect Will as their own, and he’s very grateful for it. Hannibal would fight to the death for him a thousand times over, and he’d serve Will their enemies’ heads on a platter. Probably seasoned and flamboyantly displayed too, because Hannibal is a show-off if he’s anything.

“I’m glad we met,” Will admits, muffling his confession into the skin of Hannibal’s chest.

Normally, he wouldn’t think he’d need to say it, since Hannibal knows him pretty well and is also pretty good at people reading in general. But he also knows that words are important, to Hannibal and to shifters, because to take the time to say the words can make it all the more meaningful.

And also because when they met Will might have insulted him by calling him “the big bad wolf” but in his defense it made Hannibal laugh more than it offended him.

Hannibal kisses his head, sweet and soft. “Me too, little lamb,” he says, “me too.”

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Tomorrow's prompt for day 10 is "Holiday sweater"! It might involve Will's dogs :D See you then

# Holiday Sweater

Chapter Summary

Hannibal is sneaking out of bed in the middle of the night. Will wants to know why. Surprisingly, it involves less dead bodies than he originally thought.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Dark!Will who doesn't really care about murder, but, well . . . . there isn't anything graphic

This was inspired by my darling Slippy, who made this this amazing post and I probably don't get the ten points, but hey I tried :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Will finally puts two and two together and realizes that Hannibal is not, in fact, drugging him but is still making a point of waiting until Will is asleep to slip out of bed and do god knows what, the fact that Hannibal didn't drug him doesn't really lessen his anger. Partly because they both know that Will draws a solid red line at drugs, considering his past experiences, and partly because Will has exhausted most of his truly vicious anger at said past experiences.

This anger is more of a resigned *What alibi do I have to think up now* anger.

But, like Hephaestus and his cheating wife, Will knows he must plan carefully. Hannibal is wily and clever and incredibly fond of manipulation and innuendo, and sometimes you can only catch a predator by becoming one yourself.

So Will does the normal thing and is his normal self. He plays with his pack, which is currently at three, a number Hannibal insists is more than enough: a lovely little puppy named Mica, a new stray bulldog Will found on the side of the street named John, and, of course, loyal Winston, whom Hannibal somehow arranged to be discretely stolen and who upon seeing Will abandoned his food dish to lunge at his master, leaving them both overjoyed. Will tracks in dirt and oil and dust and once in a while messes up Hannibal's aprons and pants just to irritate him. He steals blankets and clings to pillows and draws Hannibal back down for just one more kiss, just one more, just *one more* he swears. He stuffs himself on Hannibal's gourmet food and once a while brings back fish just to mess with Hannibal's careful six-hour dinner prep.

And, most importantly of all, he lures Hannibal into a state of complacency.

It's surprisingly enjoyable. And, well, he already knew from post-imprisonment how powerful it could make him feel, to weave his own net of lies around Hannibal, but this time, with no real cliffhanger or end game hanging over their heads, he finds even more fun.

All of it leads up to, finally, one night when Hannibal is trapped beneath the weight of Mica and Winston on his toes, his own sketchpad on his legs, and Will on his lap, that Will ventures a sweet: "Hannibal?"

"Will?"

"So am I going to find out where you've been sneaking off from the police or from you?"

Hannibal's finger twitches, just the slightest, enough that he has to lay down the pencil and gently smudge out the line to gentle it and guide it back into its proper place and shading. It's the only clue that perhaps he was not expecting Will's own golden net to enclose him securely and bind him in place, unable to leave without making a fool of himself to the eager audience of dogs.

Will just smirks into the soft fabric of Hannibal's stupidly elegant and fluffy tailored pajamas.

Then Hannibal lowers his hand and settles it onto the back of Will's neck, like a collar of flesh and bone, and the purr that leaves Will startles himself as much as it makes Hannibal pause.

"I do not think it will be a matter that the police will need to concern themselves with," Hannibal says, stroking through Will's curls.

It's not exactly that surprising. Will knows that Hannibal has many, many aliases, and not all of his kills were even attributed to those aliases. Sometimes Hannibal truly did just make people *disappear*, making them look like they had run or just flat out vanished off the face of the earth. It doesn't even really require too much preparation.

There's only one problem.

"We made a deal."

When Hannibal, still only mostly recovered from his gunshot wound and their crash into the sea, had still found it in himself to drug, overpower, and mutilate the man who'd had the nerve to spit at Will's feet, Will had sighed and made their deal: he'd only kill with Will or not at all. Back then, he had made the deal to ensure that Hannibal would be healed before they ended up on the run yet again, but nowadays Will finds he just enjoys holding that kind of power over Hannibal. It's a visible, verbal agreement that reflects the unspoken chain Hannibal holds to his own neck.

"I have not broken my promise."

There's no skip in Hannibal's pulse, but then again, Hannibal is an excellent liar. And an excellent loop-hole finder.

“You better tell me where that body is.”

Together or not at all is a double-edged sword. Will made it to have power over Hannibal, but he also made it to have power over himself. He is bound to Hannibal forever now, baptized together in the sea to rise together as one new creature under the glare of the moon and the deafening roar of the waves. If they are ever recaptured, they will be imprisoned or die together; there is no way for Hannibal to try and claim the kills to spare Will. He finds comfort in the lack of ambiguity.

“Will,” Hannibal says, “there is no body. I have not killed anyone since the man in Cuba.”

Will rolls over and glares at him. Hannibal looks and sounds so sincere. . . “And how I am supposed to believe you when you snuck out of bed this morning?”

Hannibal pauses. “I . . . was not aware you were awake.”

“Uh-huh.”

Hannibal blinks, sighs, and then deliberately makes eye contact, eyes wide and open, and Will realizes it’s an invitation. One Hannibal rarely makes, but then again, Will rarely accepts it even when he does offer so perhaps it’s a moot point.

Besides, it’s always so easy, too easy, to slip into Hannibal’s mindset.

*He wakes up just in time. His internal alarm clock is, as always, right on time. And, as always, he makes the mistake of looking down, where Will is sprawled warm and snoring against him, mouth parted just a little, drooling on the pillow. Will is so beautiful that every single time it’s a struggle to pull himself away from him, but he must.*

*He refuses to give up even one second of his time of Will, but he concedes that losing a bit of time when Will’s asleep is preferable to losing time with Will when he’s awake and so beautiful and gorgeous and animated.*

*So he, somehow, manages to kiss Will and untangle their limbs and creep downstairs on silent feet, because his surprise is almost done and he has a limited time frame, even given how much extra time he calculated for what he loses trying every morning to tear himself from his beloved’s side . . .*

Will blinks. “What surprise?”

“In time,” Hannibal says. “In time.”

---

Their Christmas tree only has two presents under it. They’d made the deal of, at least for this, their first Christmas together, just one present each, to avoid any kind of guilt (both) or misunderstanding (Will) or going overboard (Hannibal).

Will, when he gets his present, finds that’s a great deal more crinkly and squishy than he expected, and he’s in the middle of vowing to punch Hannibal in his stupidly attractive face

for lying about bodies when he opens it and sees what Hannibal has spent the better part of a month working in secret on.

And dies laughing.

It's a matching holiday sweater pajama set, blue and green plaid. And not matching for Hannibal and Will, which would make sense.

It's for Will and Winston.

"I . . . hoped it would fit? It took some adjustment and learning." Which, in Hannibal-speak, means a hefty amount of time spent on Google and chatting to the local sewing club which explains so much about the time Hannibal came home flustered and covered in random loose threads.

"Come here, you huge dork," Will says from the floor, once he's managed to get his laughter to a manageable level.

Hannibal wrinkles his nose, because even though he cleans the floor fastidiously every week he's still the same prissy self, but eventually he manages to lower himself to lean down over Will, who takes his face and kisses him, which magically melts the rest of Hannibal's resistance until they're rolling around on the floor like puppies themselves.

"I love them," Will says honestly, and he makes eye contact, because it's only fair.

Hannibal honest to god *blushes*.

Winston shows his gratitude by chewing a hole in the shirt within a record two hours, and Hannibal spends that night alternating between shooting Winston dirty looks, pointedly sighing, and looking up more dog-appropriate materials. Will distracts him by showing his own gratitude in more appropriate methods, and if they involve taking off the pajama set more than putting them on, well. Hannibal likes it, and that's all that matters.

Besides, it's not like Will does the laundry.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

The prompt for Day 11 is "Gingerbread house"! And I'm (not) sorry to report that this marks the end of my fluffy, sort of nonsensical chapters. From here on out it's a lot more fscked up weirdo stuff that my muse popped out ¯_(ツ)_/¯ See you tomorrow!

Since we're about a third of the way through, I'd also like to take the time to sincerely thank each and every one of you who has reblogged or liked my posts or left comments

or kudos. They truly make my day and lift my spirit and encourage my writing, so THANK YOU.

# Gingerbread House

Chapter Summary

> Will's grandmother always had warned him that gingerbread houses were to be avoided at all costs. Will makes the mistake of ignoring that warning.

Chapter Notes

> Warnings: description of Hannibal's family being murdered by evil scientists, and also kind of mpreg if that squicks you

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If there's one thing Will's grandmother was absolutely insistent on, it was that gingerbread houses were to be avoided at all costs. Will's heard the stories, and he's even heard the human version that human children whisper, although theirs is with a house made of candy.

For fairies, it's a house of ginger, laced with icing and scattered with candies.

Still, for Will, who hasn't managed to find anything to eat for several days and who is very far away from home thanks to an upstart of a fairy named Jack who insists that there's a murderer in the clan somewhere, it's a temptation almost too good to turn down. And the house doesn't really *look* menacing. It's decorated with peppermint and chocolate and marshmallows with sprinkles leading a nice path to the door. It has two floors, windows iced with pink and blue, and a candy cane gate. And it's balanced on a window ledge, almost perfectly positioned for a weary fairy to rest before taking off the next morning.

Will gives in.

It's a complete and total mistake.

The second Will shuts the door, sigils twice his size light up all around the gingerbread house, and suddenly he's trapped in a cage of glowing light, strong enough to zap him into unconsciousness when he reaches out for a curious touch.

His last memory is of two huge leering humans, laughing and poking at the gingerbread house trap.

---

When Will wakes up, he's in a new cage, this one of iron and silver, and it's nowhere near as nice as the gingerbread house. There's a tiny little bowl of water with some marshmallows next to it, and there's a little roll of fabric and ribbon Will supposes is meant to be his bed.

Will immediately takes flight, but what he sees only makes his heart sink.

His cage is not the only cage in the room.

In fact, the entire room is covered with cages, and most have two or three despairing fairies trapped inside. A few are so out of it that their wings have wasted away to nothing and they walk on two feet like no fairy ever should. Others shake at the bars and spit on the floor and send blast after blast of fairy magic, but iron and silver take the blow with no problem. They're well and truly trapped.

Still, Will takes a shot himself, mostly because he'll never live it down to Jack and the others if he doesn't. He concentrates, draws from the glowing life-force that powers his wings, and releases an enormous wave of power.

The entire cage rocks from the force of it, but the bars hold.

Will's preparing for a second blast when –

"Don't waste your strength."

Will whips around, startled, to see another fairy flutter to meet him on the ground. This one is dressed almost like a human, in fabrics patched together to form a little suit, with his hair combed straight and flat to his skull. And his wings! His wings are so strange, gleaming with neatly groomed feathers like some kind of bird. Will's never seen a fairy with wings like that.

"Who are you?"

The stranger spreads his wings, broad and welcoming, a way of showing no threat and no ill intent. "I am Hannibal."

Will spreads his own wings, but they're not as dramatic or flashy as Hannibal's. His are the common wings of a dragon-fly, translucent and iridescent, and they pale to the kind of strength and intimidation Hannibal's wings give off. "Will."

"A suitable name for one with such power," Hannibal says. "But it is still of no use. These cages were made to contain many more fairies than just us two. You will find no weakness through those spells."

"And they say I'm pessimistic."

"I am simply practical. The spells that are used to trap our kind drain our strength to make it . . . easier to process us. You must be hungry."

Now that Hannibal mentions it, Will *is* feeling kind of hungry. A few flutters brings him closer to the marshmallows, which now that the smell is clear and not hidden by human magic, stink of human and plastic and machinery. Will's diet, like all fairies, generally

consists of dewdrops and sweet fruits scavenged from the forest, although he never turns down milk or honey if he can get them. These marshmallows are just . . . artificial.

Hannibal perhaps sees Will's face, because he quickly says, "I have some apples if you'd prefer that."

"Sun and moon above, *yes please*."

---

Over a small meal of apple chunks and water, Hannibal explains that the humans who trapped Will are fairy breeders. Fairies make up a large part of the human black market for "exotic pets" because they have some magical abilities that are flashier than a normal pets and they can talk back and in general are considered more desirable than normal animals for people with human money to spend. It's illegal in the human world to own a fairy as a pet, but if anything that just gives people more incentive, not less.

There's just one tiny problem.

"But it doesn't work like that," Will points out after Hannibal's finished. "Our children are chosen. It doesn't just happen."

Hannibal inclines his head. Somehow he manages to make the human suit flattering and regal as he sits there with his legs primly crossed and his wings neatly folded behind his back. "Precisely, but that is not something that most of our kind are eager to volunteer. Not to mention that the humans would not believe us anyways."

"Probably not." Will looks at the bars again. "Are you sure no one's managed to escape?"

"As I said: the weakness is not in the spells here. They were crafted to hold many more fairies than just us two."

Will's reply is cut short when there's loud *click* and suddenly every single light in the room turns out at the same time that a fierce wind starts blowing, sending every fairy scattering. Fairies operate best at dusk and dawn, as too much light is just asking to get eaten and too strong winds are asking to be blown off course and hurt. Every instinct in Will's body screams to find cover, and helplessly he looks to Hannibal, who immediately takes off to the top of the cage, where a structure dangles from a thick pole.

Will follows because there's no other shelter in the cage, and he finds that it's a little tent of metal that's been lined on the inside with soft velvet fabric. It also has more scraps of fabric for blankets, and the walls dampen the sharp light and protect against the wind.

"What was that?"

Hannibal closes the door and sighs. "It happens every night. They believe that by driving fairies together, we would eventually bond and children would happen."

Will chooses to ignore the baby bit and focus on the other part. "Every night?" Maybe that explains Hannibal's choice to drape himself in human clothes, which surely offer more

warmth and protection than Will's loincloth of leaves.

"If you wish to sleep, simply take a blanket. They keep it cold but not so cold that your life-fire would freeze."

The word-choice is strange, but Hannibal is strange. Will accepts it and sleeps.

---

The days start to blur together. Every day they wake up to new bits of food – fruits and sweets – next to their refilled water bowl, and although Will at first starts a habit of testing the bars, eventually, he grows tired and ends up just walking around the floor of the cage to strength the legs he usually rarely uses. And every night they flee to the safety of the tent, where they take blankets and snuggle in place in silence until sleep comes.

Finally, one day Will just groans and lays in a lump in the tent and doesn't come out. "Why even bother?"

Hannibal sighs. "If you do not demonstrate movement," he warns, "they will think you are sick and likely attempt to medicate you to fix whatever illness you have may have succumbed to. It is . . . not pleasant."

"How would you know?"

There's a long silence, and it's not a comfortable silence, the kind that has reigned for most of their time together. Will is by nature a loner, and Hannibal has generally respected that, but right now all he senses from Hannibal is long-buried rage and misery that threatens to overflow and swallow Hannibal whole.

Will pulls the blanket off his face. "Hannibal. How do you know?"

Hannibal faces away from him, and his wings are a sharp line of tension to match his frozen jaw. "I have never known anything but medication," Hannibal answers finally. The words come out slow but steady, like the forced march of someone sentenced to death. Will's only ever seen one fairy exiled to death, but he's never forgotten the dread in the fairy's face as the executioner ritually ripped his wings from his back and let him fall to the dirt where he died. "I was . . . born in a lab with my sister, Mischa. The scientists wished to know if our power could be harnessed without abusing seemingly sentient creatures through breeding for less and less intelligence. My parents were medicated until they could no longer control themselves, and it left my father a useless lump and my mother prone to outbursts. In one such outburst, she finally broke one of the bars on the cage and I attempted to escape with my sister. We did not succeed.

"My sister had such . . . lovely wings. Bright blue, like the sky. They peeled back the skin and bone from her head until they could extract her brain. They then wondered if the power might be contained in our wings, so they removed them. Carefully, so I did not die, but they removed them. These – " Hannibal flutters his wings " – were grown in a lab specifically for me and then surgically grafted. It took me a long time to learn how to use them. But it was no use. My sister died, and I retained my intelligence, my anger, and my power. I was sold to the highest bidder."

Will doesn't say anything after that.

He doesn't really know what to say. Will grew up alone and relatively free in the wilds of the forest. Until he was captured he really only saw humans that came through for picnics and hikes, and he never knew they could be so cruel or so determined to peel fairies apart.

It also leads him to a new insight into Hannibal's strange tone whenever he refers to humans.

"You want to kill them. All of them."

Hannibal bares his teeth in a smile, and Will sees the fangs for the first time, sharp and piercing like that cat Will had once run afoul of. "I want to tear them apart, piece by piece," he hisses. "My species of fairies is not like yours, Will. You have magic and you reel in prey to your doorstep. I have poison. I *hunt*."

For the first time, Will is truly scared of Hannibal, and he can feel the way his wings tremble and flatten in a display of submission and apology.

Hannibal notices too, because he immediately shuts his mouth and takes a deep breath. Slowly, his wings fluff back out to normal, and slowly, the metallic scent of anger and rage melts away, and slowly, Hannibal relaxes until he's sitting his normal, elegant pose at the end of the tent where he normally sleeps.

"My apologies, Will," Hannibal says. "My anger was not directed at you."

Then he opens the door and flutters away, leaving a saddened Will behind.

---

Hannibal does not speak again for a few more days. He barely eats, avoids Will as much as you can in such a tiny cage, and sleeps a great deal.

Finally, Will decides to take the initiative.

Just as Hannibal beds down in his little corner, Will shuts the door and pretends to get his own bed ready. However, as soon as Hannibal closes his eyes, Will immediately abandons his bed and squeezes into Hannibal's, making the other fairy grumble and roll around until they both fit under his patch of scraps.

"What are you doing, Will," Hannibal mumbles flatly.

Will reaches out, tentatively because he really doesn't want to get poisoned now that he knows Hannibal can do that, and presses his fingers against the beating spark of life in Hannibal's chest. It's exactly in the same place as Will's.

"Maybe we're not as different as you think," Will whispers. "Commune with me?"

Hannibal licks his lips, but he doesn't smell like anger. He smells like curiosity. "I . . . do not know how," he confesses.

It's surprising, but maybe not so surprising. It's the most honest way fairies can communicate and it's a way often used to cement family bonds. To bring sparks together is to commune on a level no human can, and Will knows that if there's any way to make Hannibal understand Will, this is it.

"Just follow my lead."

It's second nature to bring his life-spark forward until it gleams dimly between them; Will has done it many times before in his work with Jack. Hannibal watches with eyes that glitter with interest, and he's a fast learner; it only takes him three or four attempts before his own life-spark emerges, as bright and gorgeous and Will's own. One little nudge forward, and suddenly they're communing.

Everything that makes up Hannibal washes over Will in one unstoppable wave, every emotion he's ever felt, every memory that still makes him rage, every thought that's settled into the foundations of his beings.

Judging by the way Hannibal's wings beat uselessly at his back before encircling helplessly around Will, he's not the only one affected.

"See," Will tells him, "you're not alone, Hannibal. You're not the only one who feels rage and anger and the drive to hunt."

"Oh, *Will*."

They fall asleep like that, life-sparks intermingled as their wings, and it's the best sleep Will's ever had.

---

In the morning, Will wakes to find Hannibal staring steadily at him, fondness and fear entangled on his face. The second he sees Will's eyes open, Hannibal starts touching him, hesitant but constantly, like he can't help himself. His wings are soft against Will's own wings, and the feel of feathers is strange but oh so welcome. Will needs that strength now.

"It will work, Hannibal."

"I don't want to lose you." *Like I lost her.*

Will settles his face under Hannibal's chin, reveling in the warmth of his skin and the tenderness in his touch. "It will work," he repeats.

Because it has to. Because it's all they've got. Because it's their one chance.

Hannibal lets out a great, shuddering sigh and draws him even closer, tangling their arms and legs and wings together. "I love you," he says fiercely, and then when Will takes a deep breath and bares his threat, Hannibal leans down, kisses his neck, and then sinks needle-sharp fangs of poison into Will's skin.

---

It takes only two hours of Will lying at the bottom of the cage before the humans notice and start making worrying noises. Another hour, and they immediately take their cage from the room of cages. Hannibal is subdued with a tranquilizer dart that makes him roar and rage around the cage, fluttering around in fits and starts as the drug takes effect, but he makes a point of covering Will with his wings, protecting him even as he falls unconscious.

It makes the humans excited.

When they remove Will from the cage with delicate hands, their tone is excited.

“Maybe he’s already expecting,” one of them gushes. “We’ve never seen specimen M13 so anxious about a partner.”

“Yeah, normally he ignores them or fights. Remember the one he ate?”

“Don’t remind me, that was disgusting.”

Eventually, though, they all clear out and leave just one human, who lays Will out under a microscope and starts prodding at his stomach like he thinks Will is hiding some baby fairy in there.

Will opens his eyes, making the human yelp. “That’s not how fairy reproduction works,” he informs the human, right before he lets his magic loose in a powerful wave that sweeps Hannibal’s deadly poison from his own body straight into the human’s body. On his own, Hannibal’s poison might be irritating to humans, but it’s not lethal because Hannibal is so much smaller.

For a fairy, though, it’s definitely lethal, so as Will channels it through his magic amplifies its effects until the human falls onto the floor, shaking and trembling as the poison burns its way through his veins. He dies as undignified and pained a death as Will can manage.

Hannibal is frantically flying in circles when Will makes his way over, and thankfully the outside of the cage is not nearly as fairy-proof as the inside. A few kicks and Hannibal is free.

“Are you hurt? Are you – ”

Will cuts off this series of burning questions by just hugging him, and bringing their life sparks in such close proximity is enough to answer most of Hannibal’s questions. Hannibal’s shoulders and wings slump in relief and he encloses Will in his arms like they’ve parted for years rather than just minutes.

When they part, Will asks, “Ready to hunt?”

Hannibal’s wings snap open, and his sharp cat grin is all the answer Will needs.

They leave behind only destruction and death as they fly off.

---

Hannibal, surprisingly, fits in rather neatly to Will’s mostly lonely life. He still doesn’t shed the suit, but he’s also not adverse to wearing a loincloth here and there, so Will mostly just

goes with it. His poison fangs are definitely invaluable when it comes to bringing home food, since most creatures learn very quickly not to mess with him. And he finds such delight in every facet of living in the forest that Will can't help but smile.

Best of all, Hannibal – having grown up in a lab – has never learned the etiquette that guides fairy life.

For example, he doesn't care that it's considered rather rude to touch other fairies' wings in public. Hannibal does it all the time, and Will – whose wings were often the subject of ridicule by other fairies – revels it in it every single time.

He also doesn't know that it's a very rare thing to commune with life-sparks, so he doesn't mind when Will asks for it and doesn't care how often it happens. In fact, sometimes he initiates it himself, and Will never feels more joy than to know that Hannibal wants to commune with him.

But, most importantly, Hannibal doesn't know the signs of an expecting fairy.

Fairy children are born out of love, not any kind of mating ritual like the really complicated ones Will's seen humans engage in. It's the communion that brings two life-sparks together, and the love between that can generate just enough life-force of its own that two tiny parts can combine to cause one new life, fluttering and growing. Will and Hannibal's child is flourishing quietly under Will's skin, but Hannibal doesn't connect the dots between Will's sudden reluctance to fly far away from home or his desire to make bigger and softer nests. He just shrugs and brings back more food.

It's okay, though.

Any anger Hannibal might have had is wiped completely away by the look of pure awe on his face when Will hands their tiny crying child to him, bright blue wings fluttering against her back.

"She says her name is Abigail," Will prompts.

Hannibal opens and closes his mouth wordlessly, before finally his wings draw Will and Abigail close to him, his eyes wet with unshed tears of joy. "Welcome to the world, Abigail," he says, and his voice is filled with so much love Will can't help but kiss him.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Tomorrow's prompt for Day 12 is "Elf"! It may or may not involve something regarding this gorgeous manip by the lovely byke23. See you then!

Also - if any of you didn't believe my warning last chapter about these ficlets descending into fscked-up land, I TOLD YOU SO. IT ONLY GETS WEIRDER FROM HERE. (If this didn't qualify as fscked-up weird to you . . . kudos to you, lol)

# Elf

Chapter Summary

Will is an elf desperately trying to avoid the goblin King. Marak Ravenstag declares that he will have Will as his consort or no one else. Only one of them can win.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: some dubcon vibes, since Will really does not want to bargain away his freedom, but there's no coercion or rape or anything else

So! This started off as Rudolph the Red-Nosed reindeer elves and then turned into Lord of the Rings elves and now . . . well, now I am apologetically borrowing from The Hollow Kingdom series by Clare B Dunkle. Buuuut I also have to give amazing credit to the amazing byk23, who upon hearing I was considering this decided to make this manip with Dancy elf and Mads elf and it's so beautiful I could literally not take my eyes off it.

Some basic Hollow Kingdom information for starters:
1) "Marak" is like the equivalent of the title "King" for goblins; it's "Aganir" for elves. Goblin kings are named after certain unique attributes, like Marak Sixfinger or Dogclaw or Blackwing. Elves are named after . . . IDK, weirder things, like "alone" and "evening" and "dust cloud".
2) Goblin and elf kings have to marry outside of their race, it's how the king's power is passed down and also prevents the kings from becoming too isolated, because they have to woo an outsider and learn to work with them. And it also brings in new blood. Goblins in particular strive for elves because elves tend to have magic, and more magic passed down to the king's son is always good.
3) In this universe, noble and royal elves are marked by the color of their hair and eyes. Typically, black eyes and black hair means noble/royal blood. Will doesn't have black hair, but his hair is dark-colored so I ran with that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will is running.

This in and of itself is neither new nor alarming. An elf can easily outpace almost any other race on the planet, and Will’s learned long ago that outpacing threats is the best way to stay alive. The trouble is that sometimes, when magic gets involved, that genetic advantage is usually lost in the shuffle.

Like right now, for instance, when Will's pursuers charm a tree to bow down to the earth, forcing Will to seize a branch and hurtle himself over it.

It's okay, though. It's only a few more minutes until he reaches the truce circle.

Three minutes, and his pursuers turn the path into quicksand; Will runs up a tree and starts bouncing from branch to branch.

Two minutes, and they charm the trees to shake and churn in the gripes of a windstorm; Will swings back to the ground and picks up the pace.

One minute, and Will hears the clattering of hooves that only encourages him to increase his speed. Because Will knows *exactly* what it means when his pursuers start getting nervous and antsy, and he has no intention at all of being dragged underground to a slow, tortuous death, deprived of the stars and the open sky and the grass and the tears.

Will dives into the clearing just as a voice snaps a spell, and he watches in amazement as fire licks up the sides of the truce circle.

"William," purrs the voice.

Will stands and nocks an arrow. It is pitiful defense against the goblin King, but it's all Will has. "Go away, goblin King."

"I've already told you to call me by my true name."

"Too bad."

Laughing quietly, a fearsome figure emerges from the darkness. He does not enter the truce circle, but he doesn't really need to; just from the sheer proximity of his presence, every single one of Will's instincts go off, telling him to drop everything he has, through every spell he knows, and run as far as he's ever run.

He holds his ground. No common elf can outpace the goblin King.

Or, as he's known to his people, Marak Ravenstag, a goblin with a tall black body, sharp claws, feathers patterned around his neck and stag antlers rising from his forehead. As the King he's the most dangerous thing any elf or human could encounter, with human and elf and goblin blood mixing to make him the most powerful magician in the land save for one, and the elf King's line died out so long ago no one even believes it exists. As an unmarried King, he's even more dangerous, because if there's one thing an unmarried King always wants, it's a consort to give him heirs.

"You can't harm me with that arrow," says Marak Ravenstag. "I am the goblin King."

Will inclines his head. "Perhaps. But the truce circle negates a great deal of your magic. You can't get what you want, goblin."

The goblin spreads his hands. "All I want is a simple conversation," he demurs. "Just one night, William. That isn't so hard to believe, is it?"

“Your grandmother was an elf, goblin King,” Will replies. “Your King dragged her screaming and kicking from her family and the only life she’d ever known, and you shut her behind doors underground. You took away her stars and her moon and her father and her mother, and you have the nerve to say that all you want is one conversation? If I went with you, I’d never come back out.”

Marak Ravenstag’s smile falters, just for one second. Yet Will sees no remorse in him, no guilt for the crimes of his ancestor.

But perhaps that is to be expected. For thousands of years, goblin Kings have been plucking humans and elves from their homes, imprisoning them underground. Will reckons that at this point it’s rather ingrained in their culture and society. They don’t feel guilt for the families broken apart or the mothers and fathers who mourn children they never see again.

“Go away, Marak Ravenstag,” Will says softly. “You have lost this battle.”

For a long moment, there is silence.

Then Marak Raventag says, “You are the son of an elf-lord, one of the last, did you know that? It’s your hair that gives it away. Only a lord would have hair that color.” He pauses. “I will wait for you, William. One day, you will come to me.”

The other goblins follow his retreat, and within minutes they are all gone, vanished into the mist. Will lets out a weary sigh and packs up his bow and arrow. He had gone out hoping to bring back a sizeable kill to help feed his camp, but with so much of the night wasted, that’s an unlikely prospect. Not to mention that this is the third time the goblin King has tried to take him, and he imagines it won’t be the last.

After all, if the goblin King fails to take a consort, then the goblins die. They’ve already seen it happen to the elves.

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Of course, Marak Ravenstag doesn’t leave it at that.

When the elf King died so many years ago, the Border spells collapsed. Many goblins swept through, killing elf guards and stealing elf brides and consorts. Will’s camp is one of the few that remains, and they must move every season to prevent the goblins from raiding them. Or, at least, they used to.

Will’s fairly certain the goblins know exactly where they are right now. But instead of raiding them, they leave gifts.

For example, Will finds new clothes, freshly made and sewn by hand in the old elf style. He gives them to Peter, whose father thinks little of him. The next day, he finds a book, bound with magic and blessed with spells, the kind of literature he once would have died to possess. And the day after that, Marak Ravenstag leaves him a knife, carved by hand and magic from an animal and imbued with strength and protection.

Marak Ravenstag is . . . courting.

It doesn't take the others long to notice, and the reactions are fairly split. Lovely Alana demands that he throws the gifts away, lest he encourage the courting. Mason laughs it off and taunts him for being the subject of a goblin's desire.

Will just doesn't know what to do.

On one hand, it's not like it's so brand new, the concept of offering himself to the goblin king in exchange for an end to the raids and protection from humans. Many elves have done it before him, and even king's consorts, desperate to shield their people even at the cost of their freedom. On the other hand, well. Marak Ravenstag first appeared to Will in a dream and Will punched him then, and he'd still punch him now. He doesn't want to lose his life here, on the surface, dancing in the moonlight and hunting when he wants and playing with his pack of loyal dogs. He doesn't want to be caged underground, bound by vows and spells. He wants to be free.

He just doesn't know if the price is worth it.

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And then Abigail is captured by a human sorcerer.

---

Will walks right up to the Door. For a long moment, it doesn't respond to him, and he wonders if he might need a more forceful, but then it shudders awake.

"Elf-lord," says the Door, sounding surprised.

"Er," says Will, because he's pretty sure he's no elf-lord, but if it helps him he'll take it. "I need to talk to the King."

The Door hesitates. "You . . . want . . . to talk to Marak?"

"Yes."

"Because he was quite insistent that you were very resistant to his advances and – "

"Oh, just let me in, damn it," Will snarls, because he doesn't have the time to play riddles with a door bespelled to protect a kingdom. He needs to talk to the King and he needs to do it sooner rather than later. Abigail has already been a prisoner for two days and Will's already tried and failed to get her back. He needs help, and he knows, in the depths of his soul, the kind of price he'll need to pay.

The Door splutters, but it lets him in.

Will is at least grateful that he manages to walk into court with his head held high, even as whispers and shouts follow him.

Marak Ravenstag blinks in surprise from where he's perched on his throne, and his hand abruptly stops tapping his long claws. Will can read his surprise and his pleasure as easily as he can sense the shock and the wonderment that spreads in the room, and it's to be expected.

No elf has walked the halls of the goblin kingdom since Marak Ravenstag's grandmother, and she was dragged in unwillingly.

"William," he says, and his voice is so fond it's almost like Will hadn't tried to kill him on sight.

Will swallows and lifts his chin. He has to do this. Not for himself. For Abigail. "Marak Ravenstag," he says, and he's mostly amazed that his voice doesn't shake. "I've come to bargain."

Dead silence follows his words.

"I was under the impression," Marak Ravenstag says slowly, "that you said you would never trust any bargain I might make. Goblins being dirty liars and all that."

Will winces. It hadn't been his best moment, yelling insults down at the goblin King, but Will in his defense had been both sleep-deprived and starving. "The humans have a saying," he replies. "Beggars cannot be choosers."

"I should think you too proud to beg anything from me, Will."

"Not for a girl's life."

Marak Ravenstag tilts his head. Then he makes a gesture, and at once the courtiers in the stands begin to silently file away, with many casting Will interested looks but no one daring to get close. The guards close the doors behind them, and Will is alone with the goblin King.

"I'm listening," Marak Ravenstag prompts.

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"We had a deal," Will hisses fiercely when Marak Ravenstag halts.

The goblin King casts him an amused look. "Goblins don't lie, William, surely you know this. I will rescue your Abigail. But first I will also do some looking around. It wouldn't do to have me die on the eve of our wedding. Unless, of course, you're hoping for me to die and release you from this bargain you have struck?"

Will blushes. It hadn't exactly been in his mind before, but it surely is now.

Marak Ravenstag brushes a hand against his cheek, and his skin is surprisingly warm for how strange it looks. "Cruel elfling," he says fondly. "What a King you shall bear for me."

Thankfully, the goblins make quick work of the guards – well, what guards Will hadn't already killed when he made his own attempt to rescue Abigail. And Abigail is alive and well, when they find her, although Will can't help the feeling of dread that chokes his throat when she rushes over to hug him, sobbing hysterically and flinching from the goblin guards who attempt to heal her bleeding arms.

Which is when Will notices the way Marak Ravenstag is methodically laying out a small bundle of tools, and suddenly he has a whole new fear to contend with.

“Abigail,” Will says seriously. “Take their horse and go home. Do you hear me? Go straight home. Don’t look back.”

“But Will – ”

“*Go.*”

Abigail flees.

Marak Ravenstag hums under his breath. “How interesting you are, to let her go. Are you afraid she might fall prey to our goblin charms?”

Will raises an eyebrow and holds up his wrist. Marak Ravenstag is not a fool and they both know it; before they had ever left his kingdom, the goblin King had already chained their wrists together with powerful magic to prevent Will from breaking his side of the bargain. “You and I both know your charms are the least of my peoples’ concerns.”

“Your people and my people are not so far apart as you might think,” Marak Ravenstag sighs. “But now is not the time to go into that. Bring him in please.”

More goblins bring in a struggling human who lets out a piercing shriek at the sight of the goblin King, whose tall figure strikes an even more fearsome visage with the fire at his back and magic lighting up his fingers.

“Good heavens, calm yourself,” Marak Ravenstag says. “You had the nerve to stalk and kidnap an innocent elf girl. Surely you understood that there could be consequences from such an action.”

“Get away from me, demon!”

Even Will has to roll his eyes at that. While the elves and the goblins have been separated from the humans for a long time, they’re not *that* separate. Will knows for a fact that people still whisper tales of elf dances in the hills and goblins lurking in the mountains. And that doesn’t even account for the many girls who’ve gone missing over the generations when goblin Kings found their brides among the human towns.

Marak Ravenstag presses a kiss to Will’s forehead. “You might want to look away, beloved.”

“No,” Will says.

He is buying this man’s death with his freedom. He’s damn well going to watch that price be extracted in its entirety. Besides, he wants to know exactly what kind of husband he’s dealing with.

Marak Ravenstag smiles and gets to work.

---

Afterwards, the man is taken away in small bags. There isn’t exactly much left of him, and there isn’t much left of the night either. Marak Ravenstag was as skilled as he was cruel, and

long after the man should have died, magic kept his heart pumping and his nerves firing and his mouth screaming.

“What did you see, Will?”

“It was beautiful,” Will says honestly, because elves and goblins don’t lie, and he’s certainly not about to start with his husband-to-be.

For once, Marak Ravenstag seems to be at a loss for words.

Will still contemplates, even briefly, running away.

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They are married that very night, for as soon as they return a gaggle of goblins descend on them both. They dress the goblin King in an elegant tailored suit, bright vivid colors to off-set his blackened skin and twisting antlers, and Will is scrubbed within an inch of his life, dressed in the most undignified and impractical outfit he’s ever worn, and then, to add humiliation to the list, shackled wrist and ankle with golden chains and loses his voice to a special potion the King watches him drink with gleaming eyes.

The spells of the marriage are rather simple. Spells to ensure fidelity, although they aren’t really needed because Will can only bear one child now and it’s the next goblin King. Spells of confinement and restriction, so that he can’t hurt himself wandering around the dark caves or leave through the Door. And spells of protection, including a glittering, gleaming golden snake that Will swears rolls its eyes at the sight of him before curling around his neck.

When he gets his voice back, Will about scratches his skin off. “What in the earth was that, you never said anything about a snake!”

Marak Ravenstag eyes him with bemusement. “It’s a spell, not a tattoo,” he says. “You cannot scratch it off, Will.”

“I hate snakes.”

“I thought all elves adored wildlife.”

“And I thought all goblins hated human clothing.”

Marak Ravenstag shrugs. “Fair point. Still. It’s the King’s Consort’s Charm, Will. It protects each and every consort from harm. There’s no piece of magic more valuable or powerful in my kingdom that what is on your neck right now.”

“I’d rather it come off,” Will spits.

“I’m afraid I can’t do that,” Marak Ravenstag says, sounding amused. “That Charm only comes off with my death.”

“Maybe I can arrange that.”

The goblin King laughs. “Oh, my sweet William, you are more than welcome to try.”

To Marak Ravenstag's – or Hannibal, as he insists Will call him – credit, life in the goblin kingdom isn't exactly . . . horrifying. They have an extensive library, for one, and no one dares to tell the goblin King's consort that he can't read any book he wants. A friendly goblin named Beverly takes it upon herself to help Will learn both the goblin language and how to navigate the kingdom, and Will likes her a lot. And Hannibal even consents to allowing two or three of his dogs in, although he says that the King's Consort's Charm is more than adequate to protect Will from danger.

Still. Will misses the stars and dances under the moon.

Hannibal is surprisingly okay with hearing Will moan about it, actually. "You're not the first elf that has married into the goblin King's line, Will," Hannibal says gently. "It's expected that you will miss your home. I daresay that you've still a while to go, actually, based on how long it's taken those that came before you."

"Does that mean you'll let me go?"

" . . . No."

Will rolls over in bed and groans. "What use are you then."

"I run the kingdom. I protect my people. I keep the kingdom lit with my spells and bring rain to the crops and heal the wounded. I also bless the marriages and make rulings in the court and keep the peace between the goblins and the dwarves. And every year I walk the border to bless the trees from being chopped down by human. I daresay I have a lot of uses."

"You walk the border?" Will asks. "I thought that was the duty of the elf King."

"Indeed it was."

Will waits, but no answer comes forthcoming. Sometimes his husband is the most stubborn person ever, considering how loquacious he generally is. Normally Will can't get him to stop talking, actually.

"So why do you walk it?"

"Because I respect my kith and kin," Hannibal answers simply, "even if I disagree with some of your . . . stories."

Put that way, it makes Will view Hannibal in a new light. He knows the old stories: the First Fathers who made the first races prized different things, and it's reflected in their races. Goblins value strength, and their children reflect that strength. Hannibal is a prime representation of that, with the antlers strong enough to break bone and magic enough to level a kingdom. Elves, on the other hand, respected beauty, but for the first time Will considers that maybe there is strength in beauty and beauty in strength.

Maybe, as Hannibal once told him, they are not so separate as he thought.

After that revelation, Will finds himself spending a lot of time watching. He watches goblins, he watches the kingdom, and he watches his husband.

Hannibal is shocking. That cannot be denied. He towers well above most of the goblins, and his skin color is unusual even amongst them. But it's not exactly . . . ugly. Will can find much to admire, actually.

He is well-read and eager to discuss things with Will, no matter what time of day or how tired he is. He encourages Will to do whatever he likes, even though he tends to guide Will away from lying in an apathetic doze in bed. But if Will wants to read or go swimming or riding or climbing or learn archery, Hannibal has no objections. He even agrees to teach Will magic, real elf magic, the kind real elf-lords once used in battle to drive back Hannibal's ancestors and his kind.

Will would never call him gentle, exactly, but he's very clear. Will knows exactly where he stands with Hannibal always, and Hannibal never pretends anything he doesn't feel. If Will upsets him, he tells him. If Will makes him smile, he smiles.

When he touches Will, so soft and tender, and when he smiles, so fond and approving, and when he sits back and lets Will explore his antlers and sharp claws – it makes Will feel . . . happy. Valued.

Loved.

Then one day Will wakes up after his husband, which is nothing new, but what is new is that the snake around his neck is, for once, no longer just a flat tattoo.

It's awake and talking.

" – does that make you feel, Hannibal?"

"It makes me feel . . . hopeful," Hannibal says, tone carefully smooth. One of his hands is resting on Will's stomach, and the other is gently moving through his hair. On any other day, it would make Will yawn and push into his touch, but currently he's far more interested in the King's Consort's Charm that no one ever said could speak.

"You think you've found a friend in Will."

"He is my husband. He is more than my friend."

"Friendship comes first, Hannibal."

"I know."

"Good." The snake hisses gently. "Tread carefully, Marak Ravenstag."

"Goodnight, Bedelia," Hannibal says pointedly, and Will barely represses a shudder as the snake loops itself back around his neck and lapses into painted silence on more.

Will immediately opens his eyes and glares. “So the snake not only is a spell but is also sentient?”

“Good morning to you too, Will,” Hannibal says. “And yes. Bedelia, as it prefers to be called, does have some measure of conscious. She has guarded each and every King’s Consort since the spell was first invented.”

“Okay, and you didn’t think I needed to know that a snake was watching me in the bathroom?”

“You’re hardly the first elf Bedelia has guarded.”

“Hannibal.”

“She likes wine, if you wish to beg favors from her,” Hannibal tells him, and then his husband kisses him and leaves.

---

It all comes to head two months later, when Will is eating dinner with the court and a guard comes running into announce that two elves have come seeking sanctuary and an audience with the King’s Consort.

“Me?” Will echoes.

Hannibal orders the room cleared at once, but he also refuses to leave. “You’re my consort,” he tells Will, hands folded behind his back and eyes as sincere as Will’s ever seen them. “I will not leave you alone with those who might attempt revenge for what they see as a betrayal.”

Will brushes that aside, but it turns out to be easier than he thought because the elves who stumble in turn out to be Alana and Margot.

“Alana! Margot! What are you doing here?”

“We come to ask for sanctuary,” Margot says, and her voice is strong but her knees tremble.

Will shoots Hannibal a pleading glance, and the goblin King sighs, but at least this time he seemed to give in. With a brief kiss to Will, he swept out of the doors, letting them close with a thundering bang that Will barely notices because “show-off” is practically as much a part of Hannibal as “goblin”.

“What happened to you?” Will demands.

Alana whips her head back to Will. “How can you stand him?” she whispers. “He’s a monster!”

And Will startles everyone, but most of all himself, when his first response is not agreement or mediation, but straight up denial. “No, Hannibal’s not,” Will says, and it’s like something has emerged from the bottom of his stomach. Something new and sharp and beautiful. “Hannibal is my King. And he is strong and fair and I love him.”

Alana and Margot gape at him, but Will doesn't have time for that. He has something he needs to do.

"One second," he says hastily, and then runs straight out of the room. Startled goblins point him in the direction he needs to go, which leads him straight to Hannibal's workshop, where the fearsome and powerful goblin King is pouting over some sort of weird telescope device.

"Hannibal," Will starts.

"I've already agreed to offer than sanctuary."

"What? Okay. Hannibal."

"Yes?"

"Hannibal, I love you," Will blurts out, and for the first time he actually means it. Truly and completely, without any trace of resentment or fear. He looks at his vicious, vulnerable, fearsome, powerful, handsome husband and he feels nothing but *love*, from the bottom of his toes to the top of his head.

"Will, I already agreed to offer them sanctuary."

Will stares at him, but thankfully, Bedelia comes to his rescue. She comes alive with a *zing* and a hiss, and she says, "Marak Ravenstag, come to your senses. Your Consort is telling you something you should listen to."

And then Hannibal makes eye contact for the first time, and Will sees *jealously-confusion-realization* before Hannibal says, "Oh."

"Yes, oh, you big brute," Will tells him. "Listen to your consort when he wants to tell you something."

Hannibal comes to him, almost helplessly, all of his power and strength and magic laid aside to bring him worshipping at Will's feet, eyes wet with tears and fingers trembling as he touches Will, so tender and reverent. "My beloved," Hannibal says, "I never *dreamed* . . ."

"I love you."

"I cherish you above all else," Hannibal declares. "I would not be parted from you for all the world. I – "

"Would you just shut up and kiss me?"

So Hannibal does, and it's their first kiss and yes, it could get better, but Will thinks his life is going pretty good as it is, so he just closes his eyes and kisses his husband back, antlers and claws and sharp tongue and all.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

The prompt for Day 13 is "Holiday shopping"! I think it's gonna be another ABO AU, but it will definitely involve a lot of sassy, exasperated Will. See you then! :D

I think I covered most of the basics, but if anyone still has questions about how The Hollow Kingdom universe works, feel free to message me or leave a comment! And if anyone's really curious, I highly encourage you to check the books out, they are very interesting and have some unique ideas about kingship and magic and how even a "helpless" human can really, truly change history.

Also, yes that was another Doctor Strange reference because that quote is totally stuck in our collective conscious now. And yes, Hugh Dancy is actually quite terrified of snakes, and if you don't believe me: watch this.

# Holiday Shopping

Chapter Summary

> Will’s not thrilled about the alpha his father wants him to marry and he’s even less thrilled that the man doesn't speak a word of English.

Chapter Notes

> Warnings: inherent inequality of ABO AUs, so people say rude things to Will based on his gender
>
> Aaaand I present to you yet another very loosely related ficlet. Oops.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In all fairness, it is not the fault of the slightly shocked, very elegantly, and very tall alpha that Will starts shouting the second he lays eyes upon him. In fact, in the future, Will insists very firmly that he always thought from the first moment that Hannibal was actually quite attractive, with his sharp cheekbones and gleaming eyes and broad shoulders, all features that practically screamed “strong and virile”.

Still, Hannibal will never let him live it down, the fact that Will’s first instinct was neither to flee nor to fight, but to *scream*.

---

It goes a little like this.

Will’s father has been putting great pressure on him to get married, but to get married to very particular kind of alpha. Someone who has the breeding and money to make him worthy of mating an omega, especially a Graham omega, but not someone so titled that Will becomes relegated to the background. Someone with good connections, to help with the business, but not so good that Will ends up serving them and not getting anything in return. And god help him, but someone also with a title and perhaps some good land and also strong and intelligent and capable of caring for Will and whatever children he bears.

It’s a little . . . overwhelming, to say the least.

Omegas are like rare unicorns – everyone is both completely drawn to them and repulsed by them, being entrapped by their rarity but scornful of their supposed superiority. Will is the very definition of that clash of reactions, because for years his father refused to even

recognize him, so Will grew up in a very simple, most happy life playing in the village and rolling in the mud like most other common children. So for Will, getting scooped up, recognized as a noble son, and then having an entire family's weighty heritage dropped on his lap is usually a cause for fear, not excitement.

The first few suitors, Will watches with bemusement, because they practically falling over themselves to make nice to him. All Will wants, honestly, is some peace and quiet.

The new batch of suitors is more . . . willful. They make some crass jokes when they think he can't hear, and they definitely take more than their fair share of whiffs and pats to the head. Will ejects them rather cheerily, sans the majority of their clothes, and skips his way to the main house.

By the sixth batch, Will has got his routine down flat. He strips, sunbathes or floats in the pond, and watches with an ever-growing smirk as alpha after alpha loses their place, trips, mumbles, or outright grows bright red at the "horror" of the sight of an unmated, ripe omega, naked as the day he was born. If just seeing him swim doesn't do it, coming out of the pool dripping wet usually does, and Will is always surrounded by a rather enthusiastic pack to discourage any alpha urges.

Will's father throws his hands up by the ninth month and suddenly the alphas stop coming, until Will walks into his father's study one day to see a well-dressed alpha sitting and carefully reading a contract.

Will, perhaps somewhat predictably, loses his temper.

His rant includes, but is certainly not limited to: "How dare you", "What in the goddamn hell", "What am I, chopped liver", "I won't", "If you try I'll rip your head off", and, of course, "I hate you."

Of course, it's not limited to his father either. The alpha gets as far as clearing his throat and opening his mouth before Will whirls on him, and his empathy whispers *narcisstic-surgeon-intelligent-strong-proud-musician*, so Will snaps, "You don't even say a word! Can you even say a word? I bet my father went to Europe after I chased off the American alphas, I bet you can't even speak any English but 'mine' and 'omega' and maybe 'breed'! Well, you can march right out the door and drown in the pool for all I care! I don't need a doctor or a musician and I certainly don't need another alpha who can't get their head out of their arsehole long enough to realize I'm my own person! Now kindly get the hell out of my house!"

"Where the hell do you think you're going?" Will's father says sharply.

Will snarls at him and barely resists leaving marks in the door. "I haven't finished my holiday shopping, duh! I'll make sure your present is just as delightful as this disaster you've dug out of the dirt!"

Then he slams the door, just because he can.

Will's pack can tell he's agitated. Winston in particular nudges him quite insistently and whines and licks at him until Will at last just groans and slumps to the ground, letting his pack surround in a furry pile of comfort. It helps, a little.

The worst part is that Will knows he's being a tad unreasonable. It's not entirely his father's fault; legally speaking, Will cannot inherit the family's estate, business, or fortune. He needs an alpha, at least as a guardian, and better to have a husband, bound and mated, for a guardian than to be a concubine to an alpha who could one day turn around and bleed the estate dry and leave Will stranded.

That doesn't stop it from hurting.

After a little bit, Will wipes the last of the tears from his face and looks up – and yelps.

The alpha has apparently decided to take it upon himself to follow Will. Buster, one of the most adventurous of Will's pack, is even pawing gently at the alpha's pants, and to the alpha's credit he only cocks a questioning eyebrow before leaning down and petting the dog fondly, ignoring the dirt that must be getting on his elegant suit.

As if that was the signal, the rest of the dogs swarm the alpha, whining and barking eagerly, and the alpha pets them with the bemused face of one who hasn't much interacted with dogs.

"At least the dogs seem to like you," Will ventures.

The alpha says something in response, but between the accent and the cadence of his voice, Will can't really make out what he's saying beyond that it, at least, isn't scolding Will for his outburst earlier. If anything it sounds rather like Will's own statement – calculating, calm, testing. Seeing where they stand now.

Unfortunately, when Will stands to leave, the alpha follows him.

"My father asked you to keep an eye on me in the veiled hopes that I'll give in, didn't he?"

The alpha nods. Because at least that's universal.

Will resolutely buries himself in a book and avoids all of the alpha's attempts at eye contact the entire way into town. Mostly because he actually does have holiday shopping to do, but also because he's counting down the minutes until he can ditch this alpha like all the rest.

If he takes a few discreet whiffs of the alpha, who actually smells kind of good in their little car, well. That's Will's business and no one else's.

---

The alpha proves incredibly difficult to get rid of. Like, incredibly difficult.

Will starts off easy, sliding out of the car and fluttering his eyelashes and unleashing his omega pheromones when the alpha so kindly holds the door open all gentlemanly – until he dashes off and vanishes into the crowd. The alpha appears silently by his elbow about two minutes later, looking faintly amused.

Will then takes the elevator up only to dash into one going down and cackling quietly, but the alpha, damn him, apparently moves with the speed of light down the stairs on the other end of the hall and greets him when the elevator doors open downstairs.

Finally, Will resorts to his final plan, and it seems to have some success. Will finds to his glee that his alpha is not at all opposed to being a moving shopping cart, and Will immediately drapes him with shirts and pants, and it gets even better when the crease in the alpha's forehead visibly grows with each horrifying ugly Christmas sweater Will selects, so he piles on more and more until he's actually pretty impressed the alpha hasn't dropped anything yet. Will then does the very reasonable thing and climbs under a stall or two, leaving his alpha waiting at the other end as he strides off humming into the distance.

Will is actually thinking about maybe rewarding himself with some food from that Italian restaurant he's always wanted to try but never had time to when *the damn alpha* appears like a ghost by his side.

This time, Will's yelp draws some very pointed stares.

"I am so buying you a cat bell," Will says reflexively, and it's only when the alpha smiles slightly that Will realizes his sentence indicates that he'll be seeing the alpha again.

Will groans and stomps off to get food. His mood is not at all improved by the menus that are entirely in Italian with no English translation. And Will speaks a little bit of French but he's really just in no mood to try right now. He's just about to toss his menu away and run and hide in shame when his alpha calls over a waitress and talking in what, judging by the way the waitress nods with a smile, is pretty fluent Italian.

And, well, to the alpha's credit, the dish he orders for Will is actually pretty damn good. Like, really, really good. And he doesn't even seem the least bothered by the very un-omega way Will scarfs it all down.

After the meal, Will is both pretty tired and full, so he wanders back to the car yawning as the alpha gently guides him through the crowd. That's why it's quite a shock when the alpha merely makes a slight bow and then leaves Will blinking and alone in front of the car, completely lost as the alpha walks off.

"Well," Will says to thin air, "at least his butt's nice to look at."

Then the driver delivers the rather awkward news that Will's father made a mandate that they can't leave without both Will and the alpha, so Will spends the next ten minutes of his life staring out of the window and twiddling his thumbs.

When the alpha comes back, he's holding a weird cactus plant of some kind, and he proffers it to Will the same way Will's dogs sometimes bring back dead animals – tail wagging, eyes bright, a hopeful whine in their throats.

"Christmas cactus," Will reads from the little plant identifying card. The symbolism isn't lost on him; the alpha is offering him a plant, and it's a gesture of the alpha's willingness to

provide a place for the plant – and Will, by extension – to flower and grow. It's not exactly a modern courting gesture, but it's still . . . sweet, all the same.

The alpha clears his throat and gesture to the second card in soil, which read simply: "Safe for pets, including dogs."

Something warm blooms in Will's stomach, and for a moment, he feels incredibly touched. This alpha not only kept his temper as Will tried all sorts of shenanigans to ditch him, he also went out of his way to get a courting gift Will could appreciate on both a symbolic level and a practical level.

Will hugs the cactus to his chest. "Thanks," he murmurs.

The alpha's eyes crinkle in a smile.

---

Will's father greets them when they arrive home, and this is where Will gets his second shock of the day.

"How did it go?"

Will opens his mouth to answer, but the alpha beats him to it.

"I think William and I came to some sort of understanding," the alpha says, and his English is so good it takes Will a moment to realize that he's speaking actual words Will can comprehend. "I would request some more time before I signed your contract, Mr. Graham."

"Excellent!" Will's father exclaims.

"You speak English," Will says blankly.

The alpha gives an elegant shrug. "You assumed I did not. I wondered if you would be freer with your opinions if you thought you had a blank canvas to rant upon. To my delight, you were."

Will hides behind his new plant. "Dear god, you must think the worst of me," he whines.

Which is, of course, when the alpha leans into his personal space, one large hand resting so just above Will's waist as the alpha takes a deep inhale, practically reveling in Will's scent, so close in Will's personal space Will can almost taste him on the back of his tongue.

"I think that you are quite interesting, William Graham. I look forward to knowing you better."

"Even if I say I don't want to get married?"

"Married?" The alpha laughs. "God forbid we become friendly first. Or do you think an alpha and omega cannot be friends?"

"No comment."

“You,” the alpha says, “are *remarkable*.”

---

They do get married eventually, but it’s mostly an afterthought. They already share a bed and a home and years and years together. Will, though, gets tired of the many, many appreciative looks Hannibal gets and is forced to be polite to in return, so one night he chucks a ring box at Hannibal when the alpha gets out of the shower. Hannibal is his usual unshakeable self, so he merely raises his eyebrows and asks if Will is sure.

“I think we moved past ‘sure’ the first time I went into heat and broke down your door,” Will says dryly.

Will sometimes has violent heats. Hannibal, though, seems to take great pleasure in Will’s desperation and his strength, and they often have to buy a new bed for every new heat, which makes christening new beds even more fun once the need of heat has passed and they can make love at a more leisurely and conscious pace.

Hannibal kisses him and makes the arrangements, because he’s not an idiot and also cares way more than Will does about flower arrangements and color schemes.

This time, Hannibal buys him a puppy.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Tomorrow's prompt for Day 14 is "Secret Santa"! We will welcome poor Chilton to the cast. Prepare for some Chilton!whump. See you then.

The rising-from-the-water-dripping thing is a reference to an INFAMOUS scene from the 1995 BBC Pride & Prejudice. Because Mads Mikkelsen was not the first silver fox I had a thing for. Although I guess Mads has his own dripping-water scenes, so ¯_(ツ)_/¯

P.S. To ScreamingEgg, who left a very lovely comment on my last ficlet - I have a list somewhere of random books I really liked, and I will post it with either Day 14 or Day 15's ficlet, depending on how long it takes me to find it. Thank you so much for asking! :D

# Secret Santa

Chapter Summary

Will is the elf responsible for keeping the identity of the Santa a secret. Hannibal is the elf determined to get into his head.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: casual discussion of murder, plus brutal slaughtering of Santa mythology

This ficlet exists because my brain literally went: "Oh Secret Santa! So something where the Santa's identity is a myth" and then this just sort of . . . tumbled out. *sigh*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The thing about humans, Hannibal reflects as he sets another rack of cookies on the cooling racks, is that they can be incredibly gullible.

So many human children are told, over and over and over again, that Santa is always watching and keeping track of their behavior and will definitely come to bring them presents or coal or nothing come Christmas, because Santa's elves are working year-round to make them beautiful hand-made, personalized toys.

The reality is not nearly so pristine.

In reality, Santa doesn't watch over the children all year round. There is a book of naughty and nice children, but magic moves the quills that move names from list to list, not Santa. Santa, in fact, only exists for that one night, because to sustain the magic that drives an elf from home to home bearing gifts for an entire year would actually kill that elf.

Every year, the magic that keeps the North Pole running chooses a host to live in. That elf then becomes the "Santa", the living embodiment of the magic that shines so strong most humans would die if they saw its full brilliance. That is why they allow the rumors to spread, so that most people are encouraged to go to sleep, as it's far easier to blur the minds of those half-awake than those awake and conscious. It's also why Santas must fly the presents so high in the atmosphere, which also puts an enormous strain on the host in addition to having magic clawing at one's insides to get free. It is the sacred duty of the Santa, whoever she or he or they are, to hold the magic within, to withstand the flames and the pain, and then safely return the magic to the North Pole at sunrise so that the cycle can begin anew.

For the rest of the year, the magic is free to wind itself around the workshop and the North Pole, although sometimes it gets free to express itself as beautiful splashes of color the humans call the Northern Lights.

Still, for all the pain, the Santa is the most coveted position. Each Santa retires to a pampered, honored lifestyle. And every year, the announcement of the Secret Santa is the most looked-forward to event in the entire North Pole, attended eagerly by every elf wishing it will be their year.

That is why there is the Speaker. The elf selected by the magic to learn the choice and evaluate throughout the year that elf's work and reputation, for if the Speaker deems the choice unacceptable, a new Santa is selected.

After the last Speaker, a lovely elf named Bella, passed away, the new Speaker was announced to be Will, something that startled many. Hannibal well remembers the mutterings and whispers that followed the elf with too blue eyes and too curly hair, who preferred playing with reindeer over his fellow elves. Even now, after Hannibal has spent over two years carefully cultivating a relationship with Will, the elf remains closed-off and tight-lipped.

Still. He does have a fondness for sugar cookies. Especially the dog ones, even though he's never actually ever seen a dog.

Hannibal checks the timer. Only five more minutes.

---

Will's frantic scrambles to hide his evaluation are, quite frankly, adorable. They're also rather skilled, so Hannibal doesn't even catch a glimpse at the name scrawled in Will's untidy handwriting. He suppresses a frown and instead sets down the tray of cookies, milk, and fruit.

"I thought you were on my dinner shift," Will mumbles by way of explanation for the explosion of paper all over his little office.

"It is dinner, Will," Hannibal says.

"Oh."

Hannibal does not repress a sigh when he sees the barely touched lunch tray. He took over food preparation for the Secret Keeper after the untimely . . . retirement of the previous head chef, Garret Jacob Hobbs, mostly because Hannibal had bumped into Will washing up in the baths once and had felt an unusual surge of concern of the visible ribs on the elf's skin. Elves are generally of a similar slender build due to the exhaustive amount of exercise they endure, but he's still never seen once quite as skinny as Will.

"The magic cannot choose a host if its Speaker cannot stand," Hannibal says, and it's such a common refrain that Will doesn't even flinch.

Will takes a sip of milk. "There's only half a month to Christmas. I need to finish my evaluation."

“Will.” Hannibal carefully moves a pile of papers and settles in the chair across from Will’s desk. It’s not an easy task, but Will is also fairly unskilled and uninterested in the art of small talk, so he isn’t bothered by the long gap of speaking as Hannibal settles down. “We both know that you don’t need half a month to make a decision. You are gifted, as every Speaker is. You knew whether or not the Secret Santa was a suitable choice from the first moment you laid eyes on them.”

There’s a reason Speakers tend to isolate themselves. It can get very overwhelming to have elves constantly throwing themselves at you to try and gauge your reaction to them.

Hannibal is one of the few elves who gets direct and unquestioned access to Will, and it’s not all because of the rules laid down by previous Santas. The magic itself can bar an elf from entering the home of a Speaker, because until it is all channeled into a Santa, the Speaker is the embodiment and host of its will, if not its unparalleled strength.

“Are you trying to provoke me into dropping clues, Hannibal?” Will teases.

Hannibal smiles. “Now why would I do that?”

“It’s not you.”

“Oh, I know that. I am fairly certain that I was deemed unsuitable quite a while ago.”

“Okay, what makes you say that?”

Hannibal shrugs. “We all know that elves specialize. I went into nutrition and the culinary arts, to keep our brothers and sisters fed and moving. The goal of finding a perfect Santa is one who burns with the need to fulfill the goal at hand without getting burned out.”

Will cocks his head. Even from behind his glasses, his eyes are so very blue and so very keen. Most are rightly unnerved by the way the magic gleams behind his eyes, but Hannibal is not. He feels such a rush of adrenaline, to stand in the presence of the most powerful force in the North Pole and be so close to being truly seen – yet not being seen. Others, though, are not so calm at the idea of their darkest secrets being laid bare to a scruffy reindeer herder.

“You mean you don’t care about the children being happy,” Will translates.

“I am just saying that the children should not strive to be ‘nice’ simply to get presents from Santa. They should be nice on the merit of being nice.”

“That’s just the way the world works.”

“So it is. Or is it just how the magic wishes us to believe?”

Will looks at him like he’s gone insane. “Are you trying to say that you don’t believe in the magic?” Even as he speaks, his eyes start to glow, because with every second it gets closer to Christmas, the magic begins to become more and more concentrated.

“No,” Hannibal replies immediately, but they both know it’s a poor defense for an elf.

The fire behind Will blazes to life, roaring from mere embers to something large enough to consume Will's entire house with them inside. It's enough to make even Hannibal flinch, but Will is unmoved. In that moment, he's like a Santa himself, eyes blazing and clothes tinted red by the roaring fire at his back, making Hannibal's ears ring from the sheer *power* he radiates.

Then, just as suddenly as it started, the fire dies down, leaving on trembling candles in its wake.

"Do you still doubt the magic?"

"No," Hannibal says, and it's the most honest thing he's ever said. He stands and inclines his head. "But . . . I am saying that maybe there are some humans who do not."

"That's impossible."

"Is it?" Hannibal asks, and leaves.

He must crack this teacup slowly and gently, for he does not want to miss the final explosion or any of the shards. He will piece Will back together as perfectly as he can and he will be all the more beautiful for it.

---

Will, surprisingly, comes to Hannibal first. When Hannibal walks into his kitchen early in the morning to start his preparation for all the meals he must make – for he supplies the food not just for the Speaker, but for many past Santas who he enjoys speaking to – Will is sitting on his counter, for once devoid of both his traditional green uniform marked with the unmistakable insignias of the Speaker and his distance-creating glasses, and he is breathtakingly lovely.

"Will," Hannibal greets.

"Show me," Will says, although it's more of a demand that simple stating the words.

Hannibal bows. "Of course."

---

Their first stop is not far off at all, courtesy of Winston the reindeer, who'd come right up to Will and gladly borne them both on his back.

"What is this?" Will mutters, squinting through the falling snow at the haphazard and desolate structure.

Hannibal offers Winston a carrot in thanks. "This is the house of the chef I replaced, Garret Jacob Hobbs. The magic judged him unworthy to serve and cast him out. I do not know whether he still lives."

"And your point is?"

“We are told,” Hannibal says, “that the magic cast Hobbs out for his crimes. Tell me, Will, what did you feel when the magic collapsed this house and stripped our brother of his immortality?”

Will opens his mouth. And then stops. Just stops.

“I imagine that you felt powerful. Righteous. Good, even,” Hannibal prompts.

Will looks at him. “No,” he says softly. “I felt nothing.”

Their next stop is a little farther, but they are luckily still within the reach of the magic when Winston clatters down on the roof of a human cruise ship. Will still seems fairly shocked at the audacity of the humans to come so close to the seat of the magic’s power, though, and Hannibal has to tug him a few times when he pauses, mouth agape, to stare at some human invention or behavior.

His jaw drops even further when Hannibal points down to an enormous Christmas tree, where a man in a big red suit is greeting children.

“That’s not Santa!” Will hisses.

“The children do not know that. Yet they believe all the same.”

Will kneels down and closes his eyes. When he opens them again, they are glazed and unfocused, and Hannibal nearly scratches his ear off out of shock when whispers start to swirl around them before he realizes that this is Will channeling the magic’s ability to read humans. Objectively, he’d known that Speakers could do things like this – channel and manipulate the magic that speaks through them as host – but he’s never seen it used like this. Will is indeed truly gifted.

*Oh God, not another terrible photograph, why does Mom want this, why –*

*I don’t care what I get, just a bigger present than Timmy –*

*Daddy said if I say that Santa isn’t real again I won’t get presents, so I guess it’s time for another fake smile –*

Will swallows hard. “That’s . . . not. That’s not what’s supposed to happen. The Santa represents joy,” he says, so fiercely it’s almost like he’s trying to convince himself. “Joy and the holidays and celebration. Not – not presents and fake smiles.”

He looks so shaken Hannibal almost regrets his next display.

Almost.

Instead he stands and tugs an unresponsive Will behind him, because there is still one last thing for the Speaker to see and understand. The door that closes behind them as they emerge onto the deck feels like a door that can never be opened again, and Hannibal reflects that in a way, maybe it is.

The revelation that the ship is full of human scientists eagerly blabbing about how the sun causes the northern lights makes Will's shoulders slump even further. He rubs at his eyes with an air of defeat. "Hannibal," he says, "how do you even know these things?"

"I wander," Hannibal answers simply. "I went looking for answers. There is so much in this world that none of our brothers or sisters even have the faintest idea about, Will. I want to show you that world."

"No, that's not why." Will pins him with a fierce look, as though the fog has cleared and he can suddenly see exactly who Hannibal is. It's exhilarating. "You want to see how much you can change me. That's why you're always so gently prodding, so lightly nudging. Just a few words here and there, to create doubt, to sow questions. You revel in the aftermath of your work. You're an artist who's grown tired of keeping your artwork to yourself. It's not that you don't believe in the magic, Hannibal; you just don't give a damn about it. You are your own magic."

"My clever Will."

"Don't 'clever Will' me," Will says tonelessly. "You just wanted to trip up whoever the next Santa was. Fine. You've made your point."

"What point?"

"Isn't it obvious? That it's pointless." Will takes a step off the roof, and the magic catches him, buoying him up as he turns to face Hannibal, eyes glowing so bright blue and dripping blue tears. "The Secret Santa is Frederick. Good-bye, Hannibal."

---

The announcement ceremony for the Santa is abruptly canceled. Rumors go swirling, but mostly there is just chaos. There needs to be a Santa, otherwise the magic will only grow too strong and most definitely burn out the host next year, so many are left wondering what has gone wrong. The only problem is that the Speaker refuses to see anyone.

Finally, Hannibal finds himself called up to try. He doesn't exactly get a warm reception.

"Go away."

"Will." Hannibal sets down the tray of freshly prepared food. "You are the Speaker. You cannot die."

"Like you care. You don't give a rat's arse about the magic."

"You're right. I don't." Hannibal pauses, then forges ahead. It's a calculated risk, but if it pays off, it'll be more than worth it. "I care about you."

"Funny way of showing it," Will says, and then he gets up just as something shudders and moans on the floor. Will nudges at it with his foot, and Hannibal is caught by the realization that the thing on the floor is Frederick, bleeding and moaning, at the same moment that he

realizes that the magic is thick in the air not because Will is agitated, but because it has left Will entirely.

Hannibal blinks. “You raised your hand against another of our kind.”

“Technically,” Will says, “you killed him.”

Hannibal just about see it in his mind’s eye – Frederick, deprived of his coveted position, barging in past the guards and demanding an audience with the apathetic Will, snarling and shaking and finally annoying Will so much he just rolled over and laid into Frederick, channeling of his suppressed rage at Hannibal into this puppet, only to realize exactly what he had done as the magic fled from him.

“I did?”

“Yes,” Will says, “you did.” And then one blink and the next Hannibal finds himself choking, scrabbling at the too-tight hands that bear him down into the floor.

“I should just kill you now,” Will remarks, almost carelessly, as if he isn’t about to commit not one but two murders. “You killed the Santa, after all, and then what choice would I have but to defend myself?”

Hannibal locks eyes with Will. He can’t speak, but he knows Will can read him as easily as anything. He goes limp and says, *So kill me then*.

Will lets him go.

For a long moment, there is nothing but silence as Hannibal gulps for air and Will stares morosely into the fire. Yet Hannibal has never felt more alive than in that moment, to see the truth of Will’s beauty and power unleashed with such ferocity upon him. Even watching Hobbs take out his own rage on other unsuspecting elves had not brought him such joy, which was why he eventually got bored and carefully maneuvered him into being exposed.

“So what now?” Will asks eventually.

“Now,” Hannibal says, “you eat.”

Will blinks slightly when he sees the steaming tray of food Hannibal has brought. In his defense, he’s never seen human food before. “That’s not what you usually make for me.”

“It’s soup. And chicken. A human thing. Try it.”

Will does, and it’s with another surge of pleasure that Hannibal watches his tentative first sips turn into eager gulps. The magic, at least, had chosen wisely in allowing Hannibal to specialize as he had in cooking, although it probably never imagined that Hannibal would one day turn that skill into his way out of the North Pole.

When he’s done, Will sighs and lays down next to Hannibal. The heat of his proximity is mesmerizing, to be so close to someone Hannibal has no intention on either killing or ignoring.

“You’re planning to leave.”

Hannibal does not answer. He doesn’t need to. What he does need is an answer from Will, because they both know Hannibal can’t predict Will. “Are you coming with me?”

Will rolls his head over, and watching him make the decision is like flipping a coin, because he knows that Will could just as likely choose to come with Hannibal as he could choose to stay and plead self-defense to the attempted killing of the Santa.

Then: “Yeah, why the hell not. I’m in.”

---

“*Why* in the name of the magic was that your escape route?!”

“Here, take this towel. And strip off your wet clothes, you’ll warm up much faster without them.”

“Only if you turn around.”

“I have seen you naked before, Will.”

“I’m trying very hard not to think about when that was, and also TURN AROUND.”

“Very well.” A pause. “And I asked you twice before we took the fall from the cliff whether or not you were okay with the possibility of my plan not working.”

“Well, I didn’t think we’d actually hit the ocean! I’ve never been so cold.”

“Don’t worry. Our first stop is somewhere quite warm. There are so many things to show you about the human world, Will.”

“And am I allowed to know where this miraculously warm first stop is, or is this a secret?”

“I would never think to keep secrets from you, Speaker. It is a little place called Cuba. I think you will think it.”

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Because this is late (again), I apologize. I had to get some bloodwork done yesterday and they couldn't find the vein in both arms and long story short, my arms were just not in the mood to type out a story. Anyways, today's prompt is "Star"! I'm getting a big "Stardust" vibe because that opportunity is GOLDEN, but there's also the chance my brain will wander off into some weirdo metaphor land like I did for "Secret Santa". See you then!

For a more in-depth look at the way my muse works:
Me: "The prompt is secret Santa. Whatcha got?"
Muse: "Hehehe but what if Santa was a secret."
Me: "He isn't though. We all know he's coming."
Muse: "But what if he WAS?"
Me: "There's like a dozen movies about his origin story."
Muse: "BUT WHAT IF HE WAS AND HANNIBAL WANTED TO EAT HIM AND WILL COULD BE THERE LIKE 'HANNIBAL NO'"
Me: "Wtf brain"

# Star

Chapter Summary

So they do as stars must never do: they fall.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: uh . . . . . lots of time-jumping and randomness

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*Even stars die.*

It is something everyone in space learns as they are born. Of course, not everyone becomes a star, in their little nebulas of cosmic particles and star dust. Some become planets, some become moons, some become meteors.

W912129113-G, as the humans call him, becomes a star. So does H1141492112-L.

They're one of the lucky ones who are not swallowed by the Great Red Dragon, who swallows many near stars in his endless red glowing hunger. Even more, they are born at similar times, and they become a binary star system, always circling and circling and circling. They are bound together, in birth and, potentially, in death.

That is, until one day when they do something no other star has ever considered.

They fall.

---

W912129113-G gets lucky, again. He lands in a forest with only a gash to his stomach where he collided with a tree as the ground rose up to greet him.

H1141492112-L is not so lucky. He lands across The Wall, the great divide between magical and nonmagical, and for stars, life and death. He dies upon impact, marked only by a great crater that will one day be buried beneath waters and known as a sea.

When W912129113-G walks away, he finds himself crying. It's scary.

Not because it is new.

Because he does not remember why.

---

But they are stars, and they are so much more than mere rock and dust. They endure.

---

The damage to H1141492112-L is slow to heal. He finds, as he wanders, that he cannot speak as other humans can, and they shy away from the terrible damage on one side of his face. He, though, finds it fitting, for he can feel the great gaping hole in heart where something is missing, something so vital that the damage is greater than the damage to his physical body.

W912129113-G finds that he does not change. Not as humans do. Many remark that he looks as young and unmarked as he did ages ago, and he does not tell them that he does not bother to track the years as they pass. Even though he does not remember why, he knows, in his heart of hearts, that tracking time is pointless until he can find whatever or whoever he is missing.

H1141492112-L becomes a teacher, a soldier, a musician, a count, a captain, a leader, an outcast. Nothing quite seems to fit.

W912129113-G becomes a prince, a reporter, a soldier, a student, a doctor, an astronomer. Nothing quite seems to fit.

Still they endure. They must, for even stars die, but until they do, they must carry on.

---

H1141492112-L becomes a knight.

W912129113-G becomes a knight.

They meet under different names and different faces. H1141492112-L is Tristan, and W912129113-G is Galahad. They are brothers-in-arms, and they share food and clothes and weapons. They are close and can often predict the other's movements before they even happen. They are dangerous and swift, and all the more so together.

They die, both so close and so far apart, neither aware of what they have lost.

---

H1141492112-L becomes a psychiatrist.

W912129113-G becomes a cop.

They meet yet again, under different names and different faces. W912129113-G is Will, and H1141492112-L is Hannibal. They are enemies, and they fight over everything that comes before them. They are close and can often predict the other's movements before they even happen. They are dangerous and swift, and all the more so apart.

And then they are both dying, mortally wounded, and in that span, just that tiny moment, when they are more dead than alive, they remember.

Will clutches at Hannibal, his other half, and says, "You let go of me."

And Hannibal holds back, just as tightly, and says, “I did not wish to bring you down with me into death.”

“Never again,” demands Will.

Hannibal can hear the waves at his back and the echoing distance below. This fall is not nearly as dangerous or as terrifying as the fall from the heavens above, where the atmosphere burned them so badly they nearly melted and blurred together. Yet perhaps this is what they need – a fall on their terms, to decide their own fate.

So they do as stars must never do.

They fall.

---

The thing about stars is that sometimes they are not just objects to wish for luck on. Sometimes, they themselves are lucky.

---

This time, when they fall, they do not let go. Better to die together, melding so closely they can never be parted again, than to spend another eternity wandering aimlessly, just barely missing each other.

This time, when they fall, they are lucky.

This time, H1141492112-L and W912129113-G land together, drowning in the waves.

---

And the thing about The Wall is not merely rock and stone. It too endures, dividing the world into magical and nonmagical.

---

This time, the stars fall together on the magical side.

---

“Do I know you?” says one boy to another.

“I don’t know,” says the other boy. “You seem . . . familiar.”

“I am your friend,” says one boy.

“I’m glad to know that,” says the other.

“I love you,” says one boy.

“I know,” says the other.

---

*All stars die.*

This they know. And this time, they die together.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Tomorrow's prompt for Day 16 is "Presents"! Like the kind Hannibal gives Will but Will doesn't really want. That kind. See you then!

A/N: I'm honestly not quite sure about this particular ficlet for "Star". I started off wanting to write something influenced by Stardust, which, yeah, there are some callbacks there and some random Star Wars creeped in too. But it just became very strange and very short. If you sat through it, thank you so much, because truly I have no idea what this was.

# Presents

Chapter Summary

Will gets an android as a present. The fact that the android picks a name that rhymes with "cannibal" probably should have been a warning sign.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: serious dubious consent territory here - Hannibal definitely is changing Will without his consent or knowledge, but there is no intercourse or other such violation.

Also this was inspired by this gorgeous art thing by sokuria. Go give Sokuria some love, they are AMAZING and I'm not saying that just because Sokuria was my partner for the Hannibal Big Bang.

*throws ficlets are you before running off to hide*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Anyone else might be taken aback by the huge pile of presents at the base of the perfectly arranged, perfectly decorated, and perfectly green tree, but Will doesn't even bother to give it so much as a second look. It's nothing new, this ever-growing pile of presents. Every year around the holidays his father succumbs to the guilt of never being around for his only son due to The Work, so he buys an obscene amount of gifts to try and make up for it.

It hasn't worked since Will was about three years old and everything shiny made the world better again, but he almost, *almost*, admires his father's tenacity.

The rest of him is just annoyed, because now he has to open all of those presents and it's going to take a damn sight longer than he wants to spend in his father's company pretending to be happy. Not to mention that he has to find somewhere to put all these presents, and later on, somewhere to get rid of them. Usually he donates them, but sometimes they're just so personalized or so high-tech that he can't.

Case in point: that positively monstrously huge box. It's literally bigger than Will, and he dreads finding out what it inside.

So of course, Will's father wants him to open that first. "I think you'll love it," he says, because he knows absolutely nothing about Will at all. Well, except for his name, maybe, but

that doesn't exclude the fact that one time when Will was six and coughing up a storm, he called his father and his father replied with, "Who's Will again?"

To Will's surprise, the box underneath the garish wrapping paper and gaudy ribbons is a plain, bright white, with only a strangely familiar logo on it: a stag's head, ringed with feathers around the neck and adorned with towering antlers.

"Your, uh, favorite toy," his father says, almost sheepishly. "When you were really little. You always had a thing for Earth animals."

Will doesn't bother explaining the fact that he prefers natural Earth animals instead of genetically arranged ones and that in fact his favorite toy was a dog. A normal, regular, one-headed, four-legged mutt of a dog. He suspects the explanation would be wasted on his father.

When he opens the box, Will finds . . . a man.

"Um," Will says.

"It's a next generation medical android," his father explains, eyes lighting up with excitement because of course anything related to The Work makes him happy. "We programmed it with everything you might ever need – languages, self-defense, a lot of medical stuff, even psychiatry."

"Wow. Subtle, Dad, subtle."

Will's father has never been quiet, exactly, about his distaste for Will's work with the Intergalactic BAU – "Why couldn't you have chosen a *normal* career?!" – but Will thought he had gotten his father to back off on hiring either a bodyguard or a therapist, mostly because Will is pretty damn good with a gun on his own and no therapist has ever managed to say more than six words to him before pissing him off. Apparently, all he did do was manage to encourage his father to *make* him a bodyguard therapist. In an android. And one programmed with surgery because he's that paranoid someone is out to gut Will in the streets.

It's not that Will is touched, per se. His father never asked for his opinion and never listens when he does.

But this android . . . well. There's something about it. Its face is so human it's almost bizarre, with sharp cheekbones and soft hair and broad shoulders. Will almost wants to smell it, to see if it smells as human as it looks. It probably does; most androids can pass pretty well for human if they're designed right, and his father does the very best.

Will shrugs and hits the on button. If the android annoys him, he can also turn it back off.

---

The android's first words are: "My name is Hannibal. You are Will."

Will takes a long sip of water and yawns. Opening the rest of the presents while the android had quietly recalibrated, downloaded relevant updates, and then charged itself had actually

been really tiring, especially faking surprise or happiness, so right now it takes a moment before the word choice really hits home.

Then it does.

“My father gave you a name?”

The android gives him a look, and again, it’s so strange, this one’s face. So expressive for something that only has a small set of preprogrammed facial expressions. “I gave myself my name. Is that not how names are chosen?”

“Er,” Will says, because a philosophical debate is really not what he wants to get into at frick o’ clock in the morning. “Not really?”

“You do not sound positive.”

“Well, humans are weird.”

“So I understand. Your father has been very persistent about you having a bodyguard and a therapist, yet you refuse him every chance you get. You even defy him by working in an industry where he has no connections or influence when your grades were fine enough to get you any job you wanted in his company. You are indeed very strange.”

“Says the android with no pants,” Will fires back, because he has no other retort at the moment but it least it makes the android blink.

The android looks itself up and down, seeming surprised by its nakedness. It’s not like its body is particularly unattractive, but Will isn’t quite certain why no update include a mandate about wearing clothes and not shocking the crap out of people on the street.

“I was not aware I needed clothes to fulfill my mandate,” the android says eventually.

Will takes another swig of water. “I don’t trust doctors who don’t wear lab coats.”

“Your scent indicates that you are lying.”

“Did you just *smell* me?” Will demands. Again, this is a top of the line android with top of the line sensors, but Will had only seen the android tilt his head just the tiniest amount. He’s never seen an android act so human; most are pretty inhuman and robotic in every gesture they perform and word they speak.

“Difficult to avoid. I was installed with the most advanced sensors available.”

“Okaaaaay. Just go put on clothes please.”

“As you wish. Any particular requests?”

Again, weird phrasing – androids have to obey human commands unless it violates one of the three laws – but Will shrugs it off. It’s late, he’s pretty drunk, and again he has no desire to get into a deep philosophical conversation with a medical android at frick o’ clock in the

morning. Further examination of the android his father built can wait until he's more conscious and gives more of a damn. "Nope."

Perhaps this is why the android turns up the next morning in sunglasses and a lurid pink hoodie.

Jack takes one look and goes, "GRAHAM!"

---

For all his weird quirks, though, Hannibal turns out to be rather useful. Aside from certain pointed comments on Will's eating habits, he quickly figures out that the best way to change them is not to needle Will endlessly, like his father does, but to silently substitute his food choices. The next time Will is hungry, for example, Hannibal just *happens* to be cooking some really healthy and tasty dinner. And when he is woken up really early by Jack, Hannibal just happens to brew some high-quality coffee. Things like that.

Hannibal also tries and fails to take over his clothing style. Will quickly puts a stop to that.

But other than that, Will finds that Hannibal actually isn't as annoying or weird a companion as he might have feared. Hannibal drives him anywhere he needs to go without complaint, effectively shields him from nosy reporters or paparazzi, provides him good food whenever he wants, and effortlessly takes over treatment from his current team of fretting doctors.

Still, the first time Hannibal shows up in a lab coat emblazoned with the ravenstag's head, Will can't help himself and starts laughing.

Hannibal looks positively miffed. "You said you would be unlikely to take me seriously if I lacked your 'white coat'," he sniffs.

"I was joking," Will forces out between wheezes.

"So your reaction suggests. Shall I change into something more suitable?"

"Up to you, I don't care."

Hannibal is methodical and clinical as he examines Will. It's a very thorough examination too, although Will really doesn't start questioning it until he finds himself with the android's head between his legs and fingers in some rather private places. It's a measure of just how much he has started to get used to Hannibal.

"Um."

Hannibal pauses immediately. His fingers are incredibly warm against Will's skin. "If you are wondering why I am not wearing gloves," he says, "my synthetic skin is not able to contract disease."

"Really not what I was wondering right now."

"Then?"

“This is, uh, pretty deep for a first time scan, isn’t it?”

Hannibal blinks. “If I am to treat you, Will, I must treat all of you. I must know your body and mind, so that if anything goes amiss, I can care for you to the best of my ability. Is that not what my mandate was?”

“Well . . . yeah, but I’m pretty sure it also didn’t include your fingers up my butt.”

“I am nearly finished,” Hannibal says, face poker-straight.

Will sighs and flops back down onto the table, covering his eyes with an arm. Some battles, you just learn not to bother fighting.

He is rather less composed during their first psychiatric analysis.

“Tell me about your mother, Will.”

Will rolls his head over, and his eyes too, just for good measure. He’s seated in a standard reclining chair and Hannibal is sitting with his legs crossed and an actual goddamn notebook, because “The environment and the idea of therapy is just as important as the therapy itself, Will”.

“That’s some lazy psychiatry, Doctor Lecter,” he drawls.

“I thought it would be preferable to questions about your strained relationship with your father.”

“Yep.”

“ . . . You are not going to answer me, are you?”

“Nope.”

Hannibal actually sighs. Seriously, Will really has to figure out who packaged Hannibal’s set of preprogrammed expressions because they are all over the goddamn map. “Very well. Shall we discuss your relationship with your surrogate father then?”

“Who with the what now?”

“Jack Crawford.”

“Seriously?”

“You have informed me that your family is off-limits. That leaves your work.”

Damn androids and their monotone sensible-sounding voices. Will groans. “It’s . . . complicated.”

When Hannibal stays silent, because he doesn’t need to breathe or blink and it actually gets kind of creepy, Will breaks.

“Okay, so . . . I was wandering around university. I didn’t know what to do with myself. I just felt . . . adrift, I guess. And Jack picked me up, helped me out, got me a few jobs here and there. We just sort of . . . fell in together. And I’m kind of useful to his line of work. I’m good at it. I help save people. So I just . . . keep doing it.”

“You could save just as many lives by working with your father. Medical androids like myself are deployed all throughout the galaxy. We can work harder, faster, and longer than any human to save those who might not be saved otherwise.”

“It’s not the same though.”

“Isn’t it?”

“Is that my father speaking,” Will says, “or you?”

Hannibal straightens his shoulders. “You are quick to blame my questions on your father. Do you feel abandoned by him, Will?”

“Nah. Abandonment requires expectations. I knew better than to fall into trap.”

“And how old were you when you learned this lesson?”

Hannibal’s tone is soft. Precise. Nonjudgmental. Like any proper therapist.

It’s grating.

Will abruptly rolls to his feet. Hannibal probing his body had already been strange enough. He’s far less amused, he realizes, at the android probing his mind as well. It’s his last sanctuary. “And that’s the end,” Will snaps. “No more of this. This – this is why I hate therapists. I don’t need a therapist. I just need to do my job.”

Hannibal tilts his head back, although not by much. It’s rather like a snake, cocking its head at a bird – the bird might be sitting above the snake, but the snake feels no threat at all. It just would have to stretch out a little more, and the bird would become dinner.

“I am not programmed to care about your job,” Hannibal says. “I am programmed to protect you.”

“Well I’ve been doing just fine on my own.”

“The incidents of you losing time do not support that statement.”

Will nearly hits him. Only the understanding that he’s more likely to hurt himself than Hannibal, who is much taller and stronger, stops him. So instead he just orders Hannibal to stay at home the next day instead of coming to work with him. Hannibal protests, but Will slams the door in his face.

He pays for that when the world starts falling apart at the crime scene.

Will wakes up bound to a chair with a mask over his face, so he thinks it's rather reasonable that he panics and starts struggling.

But then Hannibal appears over him, one warm hand at his neck, and says, "Will. Calm yourself."

"Han – Hannibal." Will licks his lips. "Hannibal, where am I?"

"At home," Hannibal says. "The restraints were for your safety. You kept trying to lash out, assuming I suppose that I was trying to hurt you. Agent Crawford called me when you started seizing at the crime scene and stuttering my name. I brought you home and started treating you."

"Seizing?"

"Yes." Hannibal glances at the mask again, which is when Will realizes that the mask is tracking his eye movements and heart beat. Hannibal makes a little note in his notebook, although Will can't for the life of him read what he has written. Maybe it's because it's upside down or maybe it's because it's in some android shorthand, but it does not make Will any less nervous. "You had a mild seizure."

"Oh."

Hannibal looks at him. "That doesn't seem to bother you."

"You said it was mild."

"Or maybe it is because you were already aware that you were having seizures and losing time beforehand and neglected to tell me."

Will winces. For an android, that tone is icy biting cold, and he feels suddenly laid bare, like Hannibal has cracked open his ribs and pulled out his heart for all to see. It feels shocking vulnerable. "I didn't . . . I didn't think it was this bad. I just wanted to save lives."

"I do not care about the lives you save, Will. I care about your life. That is my mandate."

But when he releases the restraints and lifts the mask, Hannibal is exceedingly gentle, and Will senses he's perhaps been forgiven. Hannibal gives him several injections, checks him for injuries, and then makes a point of staying very close to him for the rest of the day. Will finds, for the first time, that he doesn't really mind being smothered, but maybe that's because he finds Hannibal a better armor than his own skin.

---

Will refuses point-blank to go to the hospital, so Hannibal, in a fit of annoyance, just starts trying to treat him his own way. He tries several different medications, randomly ambushes Will with injections, and attempts to persuade him to take up meditation or yoga.

Will laughs off meditation or yoga, but he does start volunteering at a local animal shelter and that does help.

The injections he mostly ignores, because Hannibal's equipped with enough medical sensors and databases to not accidentally poison him and he usually feels better after an hour.

He stops the medications though, because he has a really bad dream where he's tied down in a chair, frantically struggling, as Hannibal – ringed with feathers round his neck and adorned with antlers that stretch to the sky – calmly removes his organs and replaces them with robotic ones, injecting him in the heart with adrenaline every time he starts to faint from the pain. Hannibal ignores each and every one of his cries and pleas without flinching, and even has the nerve to kiss him on each and every stitch after he's sewed Will back up. It's so unnerving that it ends with Will vomiting in the bathroom when he wakes up, and Hannibal is so nonplussed he doesn't even argue about stopping the medication.

However, it all comes to a head when Will wakes up one night to find himself in the middle of nowhere, barefoot and shivering and surrounded by confused cops.

"Sir? Sir, are you all right?" asks one officer.

Will starts to shake. He's sleepwalked before, after all, a side effect of his abilities. But each and every time, he's usually kept to the house or been stopped by Hannibal. Hannibal's charging station is right by his bedroom door, after all, and he's had many times where he's woken up to find Hannibal carrying him back to bed.

He doesn't know where he is right now. He doesn't know where Hannibal is. And, to his shock, all he wants is Hannibal.

"Hannibal," he says, "I want Hannibal."

After that, everything happens very quickly. The officers give him shock blankets and coax him into a car, where they cluck over his bleeding feet and test him for drugs or alcohol. Hannibal arrives on a motorcycle, pristine as always but face etched with concern, and he makes a beeline for Will.

"Will," he says, and his arms are a warm, welcoming cocoon as he wraps himself around Will. "Will, I am so sorry. I just stepped away for one moment to download an update, your breathing patterns indicated you were deep in REM sleep, I did not even think for on moment _ "

Will buries his face in Hannibal's chest and tries not to cry. "I want to go home, Hannibal. Please."

"My darling," Hannibal breathes, and then he's being lifted up as Hannibal swaddles him like a child in a huge coat that smells like Hannibal. Will dozes against him as Hannibal makes meaningless sounds at the officers – assuring them he's all right or something, Will imagines – and then starts the long journey home.

---

This time, Will is expecting to wake up bound to a chair with a mask over his face. What he is not expecting is to find Hannibal just sitting by, watching his bleeding feet.

“Hello, Will.”

“My feet – ”

“They are healing,” Hannibal says, tone perfectly calm as though Will hadn’t been dripping blood everywhere as Hannibal carried him inside, making fretful little noises.

Will wiggles his toes, and he’s surprised that there is no pain. Surprised – and suspicious. There’s medication in the universe that can heal that fast, but Will doesn’t feel the tell-tale achiness of bruised soles and freshly bandaged wounds. And Hannibal’s cared for his injuries before; even with the kind of anesthesia Hannibal can administer, Will knows the difference between healed and simply numb.

“Humans don’t heal that fast.”

Hannibal’s face changes when he hears that. It’s so slight most wouldn’t even notice it, but Will’s been studying Hannibal’s face ever since day one, trying to figure out which expressions he’d been preprogrammed with. And yet Will’s never ever seen *this* expression: guilt and surprise and pleasure, all mixed into one.

All of it simply screams one thing – Hannibal is not surprised by this.

“Hannibal,” Will says slowly, “what have you done?”

“I whispered through the cocoon,” Hannibal replies. “I nurtured the caterpillar. And I protected you.”

Will groans and twists his hands against the restraints. Of course now of all times Hannibal chooses to answer in the most random, obscure metaphors he can, when Will needs the answers most of all. What he really wants to do is run his hands through his hair, but with the restraints –

Will pulls, and they snap right off. To an android, these restraints would be nothing, but they were made to contain a human far stronger than Will.

“What. Have. You. Done.”

Hannibal crosses his legs, as though they’re discussing what to have for dinner instead of the fact that Will is displaying strength and healing more akin to androids than to humans. “Do you know how androids regenerate synthetic skin, Will? The secret for my model is nanobots, very small, but very powerful. And you know the most amazing thing of all? These nanobots were originally designed to work in humans, back before your kind spread among the stars. I believe the original intent was to stimulate stem cells and repair internal organs. But with the right amount of tinkering – ”

Horror floods Will’s system and freezes him in place. “Oh my god, it wasn’t a dream.”

“The organ replacement?” Hannibal sighs. “No, unfortunately not. You were quite stubborn, and quite strong. It took a great deal of hypnosis to convince you it was a dream. I only took one of your kidneys though. Just for a test.”

Will tries frantically to count how many times he's had that dream, bound and struggling in the chair, whimpering and whining and screaming as Hannibal roots around in his body, but then he starts trying to count how many times Hannibal's injected him with that strange brand of "medication" and he almost throws up because he can't count that either.

"What did you do to me?" Will whispers.

"I made you better. Like me."

The entire house shakes, and Hannibal covers his eyes as though someone's done something unspeakably rude. In the past, Will had found it funny and had tried his best to slurp his soup and use the wrong utensils just to annoy Hannibal. Now he's just too scared to even try.

"And that would be the police," Hannibal sighs. "I was worried they would run the tests to discover how your physiology had changed. The final injections were already accelerated to accommodate your increase in strength and tolerance, but I suppose there is no better time than now."

"Now to – " Will starts to say, except then Hannibal shoves him down, effortlessly pinning him into place with his wrists trapped above his head and a knee against his stomach.

And Will's grown strong; he can feel the way the metal gives as he pushes against the back of the chair, frantically trying to escape the syringe Hannibal is humming, actually goddamn humming, as he lifts it from the tray and prepares to inject Will with god knows what, but Hannibal was designed from the start to be damn near indestructible and nearly three times as strong as any human could physically be. He can't escape him.

That just leaves his mouth. "Hannibal," Will tries, "Hannibal please, Hannibal stop, I don't want this, *Hannibal please* – "

Hannibal sighs. "This might sting. The dosage is far stronger than normal."

"You can't hurt me! I order you to let me go!"

Hannibal just clucks his tongue. "I am not hurting you, Will. I am calculating my strength very precisely to contain you without hurting you. I would never hurt you."

"How can you – Why – "

"You are trying, I suppose, to determine why I am not obeying your orders as you assume the Three Laws would force me to. There was a slight . . . alteration, shall we say, to my coding when I was designed. It is called the Zeroth Law. As long as I do not hurt humanity, I am free to do as I wish. And what I wish, my Will, is to see you become the glory I know you can."

"Hannibal – "

*Sting* hardly seems appropriate. The injection burns like fire under Will's skin, and he just opens his mouth and screams and screams because this is worse than the time he jumped out the window thinking he could fly and broke both his legs, worse than the time he had sunburn

all down his back, worse than the time he got frostbite and nearly lost all of his fingers and toes. This is the literal trial by fire, except Will's not really sure he'll survive.

When it's over, Hannibal lets go and Will slides off the table and lies on the ground, weak and shaken.

"Oh my beloved," Hannibal murmurs, petting his hair. "You will survive. You were a brilliant candidate for this experiment. Almost perfect, in fact. And you will never want for anything again; I will see to it."

When the officers finally burst down the door, ready to arrest Will Graham on the suspicion on biological tampering due to the nanobots in his blood, they find nothing but blood on the floor and shattered windows. His personal medical android is gone too, but everything else is untouched – his clothes, his IDs, his money, everything. He vanishes without a trace, and no one ever sees him again.

---

The air on the first Earth is crisp and somewhat unhealthy. But that is no concern to the two new owners of a rather large estate in what used to be Europe.

When they enter the bedroom, Hannibal doesn't even bother to chain him as he's been doing. Will gave up trying to escape three star rotations ago, when he realized that he was labeled as a fugitive wanted in six systems. Whatever Hannibal made him into, human or android, his self-preservation instinct is still strong. He knows Hannibal will keep him alive.

"The humans abandoned the first Earth when they had polluted all the land and drained all the seas," Hannibal explains primly, like Will hasn't heard it a thousand times. "We are here to retake it."

He's not lying either. Will's seen no one but androids since they landed.

"So what now?" Will asks dully. It's almost a moot question; he doesn't really care. He can't die or go home now. All that's left is to carry on and move forward.

"Now, we will settle in and I will attempt to secure our assets. We have enough to get started, but I would prefer to ensure that we are self-sustainable for a long time to come."

"You do that."

"And you?"

Will closes his eyes. Normally, he'd drink, but now that's a weird android-human mix, he can't get drunk so it's a pointless exercise.

"You still resent me for taking you from home."

"No, Hannibal, I resent you for injecting me with god knows what and changing what I am without my consent. That is what I resent you for."

"I made you strong."

“Without my prior knowledge or consent!”

“Such things are questions for human morality,” Hannibal says. “I am an android. My mandate was to protect you. Jack Crawford and his work endangered your life. So I removed you from that sphere of influence. My only other mandate was to preserve your life above all else. This I have done, and I will continue to do it until I perish in your defense.”

Sometimes, Will can’t tell if Hannibal sounds more like an obsessed stalker of a strange or a fanatically obsessed lover. Not to mention, Hannibal has both a perfect memory and Will’s complete medical scans.

At least he hasn’t brought up the time Will tried to seduce him to get his guard down so Will could flip his off-switch and run away, and Will has no intentions of bringing it up himself. It had been wholly embarrassing for him, especially after Hannibal had figured out his intentions in record time and simply decided to flip the tables by bringing Will to torturous climax after climax until he could no longer offer any resistance instead and definitely was in no place to disable Hannibal.

Will doesn’t bother flinching when he feels Hannibal touching him, just a simple slow stroke through his hair that feels so good he barely stops himself from turning his face to meet Hannibal’s palm. “Why me?” Will asks.

“Because you are mine,” Hannibal answers, “and I could not lose you. In time, perhaps, you will understand.”

Will doesn’t tell him that understanding isn’t the problem. He’s am empath; of course he understands. There’s a reason Will hasn’t tried to contact the authorities, despite the lack of locks on the comms. He knows exactly what they would do to Hannibal, and Hannibal’s designs include the ability to feel pain, even if it’s not quite the same as a human’s ability.

It’s just a little hard to swallow, that’s all, the realization that out of all the beings in the world, it’s an android that was designed not to have or understand emotions that has treated Will, the man with too many emotions, with the greatest love.

Maybe, one day, Will somehow will find the courage to tell him.

Maybe.

Until then, he just sighs and turns over. Hannibal can stew for a little while longer. He deserves at least that much.

---

It’s at the end of her sightseeing tour through the Graham Mansion Museum that she notices the man. He’s got the most wistful look on his face and he’s lingering in the foyer, turning in a slow circle, like everything is at once painful and so beautiful.

“Sir? Do you need any help?”

The man turns and it's like looking at a ghost; she barely stifles a gasp. He looks *exactly* like the missing Graham heir, right down to the amazing blue eyes that always rivet everyone in the holophotos that decorate the house framed by chocolate curls and a gentle, youthful face. About the only difference is that this man has more lines around his face, laugh lines and frown lines and tense lines.

She doesn't ask for his name though. It can't be William Graham, the missing tech heir, surely it can't. He went missing over three hundred years ago, and even his own father conceded he must have died somewhere and would never be found.

"Ah, no, no thank you," the man says, and his accent is very strange. Like he doesn't really remember how to speak Standard properly. "Just . . . old memories."

"Yes, this style of house was very popular not too long ago," she reasons. "Are you new to the area?"

"Yes and no."

It's a strange answer, but before she can ask for clarification, another man appears at the entrance. His coat is already on, and he has another draped over his arm; for this startling William Graham lookalike, she assumes, and the man immediately walks over to him with a private smile on his face.

"Did you enjoy the tour?" says the second man, helping the first into his coat with pauses to kiss his hair.

"Good memories," says the lookalike. "Old ones."

"And?"

The lookalike man just smiles. "And I made my choice. I don't regret it."

There's something very, very strange about what they're saying, but she can't quite put her finger on it. They're speaking in an old version of Standard too, very formal, the kind layered with innuendos and hints and double meaning. Perhaps they are old money, discovering where their roots began, for indeed many found their start in the Grahams' many tech businesses.

Either way, they both incline their heads to her and depart, and she shrugs it off. It's an indescribably small chance for two people to look exactly alike, but maybe, just this once, it is true.

Maybe Will Graham did have his happy ending, in whatever reincarnation or life he's living now.

By the next day, she's completely forgotten about it.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Day 17's prompt was "Reindeer". For a hot second I thought about making a sequel to my Bambi fic but then I saw Fantastic Beasts & Where to Find Them and my muse got idea-happy.

RL is currently being a little demanding s**tshow, so for now I'll be giving you all two updates a day til I catch up. Hopefully that makes up for it. If not . . . *hoists shield of unwritten ideas into the air and covers head*

# Reindeer

Chapter Summary

Hannibal's a rescued lab experiment. Will is a runaway human pet. But they're both ravenstags, so they have to learn to live together.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: very faint implied bad-things being down to poor baby Hannibal

This was inspired by Fantastic Beasts And Where to Find Them, although there are no spoilers beyond what you see in trailers, which is that Newt Scamander is a wizard who collects unique and strange magical creatures.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Intellectually, Hannibal knows that the strange man who wears collared shirts and smells like bowtruckle means no direct harm. But Hannibal's also lived most of his life under the "tender care" of men who dressed and waved their sharp-smelling-sticks like this man, so he reasons that it's not really his fault that he instinctually snaps and beats his great raven wings when the man gets too close too fast.

"Wow, okay, okay!" says the man, backing up so fast Hannibal is actually surprised he doesn't fall over. "Okay, I'm – I don't mean you any harm. I just wanted to make sure the nasty drugs they'd given you had worn off."

Hannibal snorts and folds his wings back. Obviously the drugs have worn off, else he would still be a drooling, incapacitated mess on the floor.

The trouble with being an incredibly rare species is that no one really knows what to do with you in any sense, so just like the thunderbird Hannibal is now sharing space with, Hannibal had been drugged as much as possible whenever they'd tried to transport him. He knows he's not the last of his kind – he can smell at least one on this man here – but he'd been rare and valuable, especially for the feathers in his wings and the antlers on his head.

The man shakes the pail in his hand, and a delicious scent wafts out. "I've got some fresh meat," he says gently, and starts laying out neatly sliced squares of some very bloody, very fresh meat. "If you smell something strange, I promise it's only some medication to help with the bleeding you've got."

Hannibal hesitates. On one hand, he is indeed very, very hungry. The lab always left him just a little bit starved, so that he couldn't utilize his full strength to simply fly away. But to be drugged again after being clear-minded for the first time in so long . . .

And then the debate abruptly stops, because out of the little copse of trees trots another ravenstag, bold as brass.

It's a young one, very young, only just come into his antlers and adult feathers. He barely gives Hannibal a passing glance before padding over to nuzzle at the man fondly and then starting to nose amongst the offerings of meat.

"Hello, Will," greets the man, affection clear in his tone. He punctuates it with a long, gentle pet to Will's flank, which makes the younger ravenstag snort. "Nice to see you. This is Hannibal, he'll be living with you for now until I can back to Lithuania and release you, okay? Let him have his fair share of meat, please."

Hannibal tilts his head. It's just so . . . bizarre, to see one of his kind, the proud and mighty ravenstags, acting around a human like a common *pet*, begging for treats and allowing such close contact.

"Ah," says the man hastily, "Hannibal, this is Will. He, uh, was kind of raised as a pet? Anyways, he's no threat to you, don't worry. Maybe you can teach him a bit about being a true ravenstag, hmm?"

Hannibal almost wants to snap at him. You can't teach being a ravenstag. You are or you are not. Simple as that.

Still. The instinct to gather in a herd is strong too. And Will is going to be utterly useless as part of Hannibal's herd if he knows nothing about being a ravenstag. And . . . technically . . . it's not really his fault that he knows nothing of being a ravenstag if he was indeed raised as some poor human's pet. And technically it's also the elder's duty to raise the young ones and it's not like there are any other elders left . . .

Hannibal heaves a great sigh and eats his damn medicated fresh meat. He has a lot of work to do.

---

Will, as it turns out, is legitimately clueless. About everything.

"But why must I drink upstream? What's wrong with downstream?"

"Do I really need to preen my feathers? I think they look fine. And it rained yesterday, they're clean."

"What if I just . . . don't fly? Is that okay?"

Finally, it culminates in: "Why can't I eat those berries? They taste good."

Hannibal then has to stand guard whilst Will spends the rest of the night heaving and choking as the berries work their way through his body, sighing all the way. Will grows feverish and

whimpers and whines, but gradually as the fake sun rises he starts to relax, calmed by the steady presence of a fellow ravenstag nearby who occasionally brings him fresh water and prevents him from getting hurt by any of the other various unique and lonely creatures this strange man has collected.

Hannibal gives him a good lick up the neck. It's a good sign that Will no longer smells like poison, but he tastes even better. "Next time," he says, "no more berries. Your stomach cannot handle them anymore. We are carnivores, Will."

"But I've eaten them before!"

"And now you have come into your true self," Hannibal explains. "You have grown the wings of a raven and the antlers of a stag; you are indeed a ravenstag. And our kind eat meat."

Will looks at him, legs splayed willy-nilly, and it's truly a pitiful sight.

"How am I supposed to get meat?" Will wails. "I can't even walk!"

Hannibal nips him sharply on the neck, but to his delight Will snaps back, wings beating at his side to smack Hannibal in the face. It's a good sign that his self-preservation instincts are returning.

"You have me," Hannibal says, relenting to lay down at Will's side and cover his fellow ravenstag with one warm wing. "I will hunt for you until you can learn how."

Will huffs into the grass. "You hate me. You want to get rid of me the second we get to Lithuania." His tone turns soft, mournful, resigned, the same tone Hannibal's parents had had after they realized there was no escape from the traps that had snagged them on one of their daily flights. It's disheartening to hear them from what is probably the only other ravenstag in existence. "Face it, Hannibal, I'm useless."

Hannibal blinks. "I do not hate you."

"You always groom me. Always. Even after I bathe. You think I stink. Literally and metaphorically."

"Will," Hannibal says, exasperated in a way he never remembers being with even the stupidest of his human captors, "I groom you as a sign of affection. It is a way of bonding, for me to assure your continued well-being as I settle your mind and determine your health. You are meant to groom me in return."

" . . . . Oh."

"Yes, oh."

Just to make his point, Hannibal embarks on another grooming session, and Will smells like drowsiness and clear water and fresh meat and Hannibal-and-Will, finally free of that nagging bitter scent Hannibal finally realizes was Will's fear that Hannibal would abandon him the second they went back to the home forests that are honestly just as strange to Will,

who's never seen them, as to Hannibal, who hasn't seen them since he was a fawn himself. The only difference is that this time Will clumsily attempts to return the favor, but Hannibal tolerates the effort. It's done with good intent, at least, if ill manners and inexperience.

Hannibal can always teach him better.

---

When he sees the red glow and the faint shape of antlers, Jacob has a split second of thinking *of course Rudolph was because of wizards messing around* before the animal gets a little closer and he realizes it's actually some weird reindeer-raven hybrid, with glossy black wings tucked neatly at its side along a huge crown of antlers. It's beautiful, if fearsome, but it quickly ruins the dignified image by making a soft huffing sound and trotting closer with an air of friendliness.

Even its red eyes are a source of warmth and curiosity that makes him laugh.

"Hey, Mr. English Man," he says, because that joke never gets old, "you've sure got a friendly Rudolph here." Even if its eyes are red and not its nose, he figures from really high up in the sky who can tell the difference. Especially given its powerful-looking wings.

That image is immediately ruined when Newt takes one look and starts waving his hands, "No! Nope, do not go near Will, back off, right now, Jacob!"

Jacob is just in the middle of asking why, because honestly Will is the friendliest of the scary looking bunch, when another raven-deer thing swoops down out of the sky, landing with a fearsome thud, wings mantled and huffing steam in great big snorts like it breathes fire. This one's eyes are not at all friendly, despite the similar red glow, and when Jacob starts to back away slowly, the thing rears up and gives every indication of chasing after him and running him over, antlers at the ready.

Thankfully, Newt gets there first, and the angry stag averts its charge only a few scant centimeters from them.

"Whoa! Hannibal, it's okay!" Newt shouts over the stag's angry bellows. "Don't worry, Jacob doesn't mean Will any harm! That's it, Hannibal, calm down, that's it. We're just – going to back away slowly now and not challenge you, don't worry, Will is safe, you're safe, you're both safe, I promise. I promised I'd get you home, remember?"

Hannibal gives one last threatening glare before he turns around and nearly knocks the other stag over with the force of his nudge.

The other stag huffs at him with a toss of his head, almost like a petulant child.

"They're ravenstags," Newt explains. "Very rare, very aggressive, very beautiful. Just gorgeous in flight. Will's . . . really not got a very good sense of self-preservation, poor thing was raised as a pet from childhood until he started sprouting antlers."

"And the other one?"

“Hannibal? That poor one got tangled up in some lab experiments. He’s, uh, not very trusting of humans. Any humans, really. But especially around Will, he’s *very* defensive of Will.”

It’s not like Jacob’s going to argue. Hannibal had nearly gutted him on the spot just for touching Will, who’d come up to nuzzle him.

Of course, it’s rather hard to make that argument now, given that with distance and some pointed headbutts from Will, Hannibal seems to have calmed down a lot. Will’s folded his legs and plopped down in a small bit of grass, and after some more menacing glares, Hannibal follows suit and spreads one big black wing over his fellow ravenstag. They then cheerfully ignore the humans and start nuzzling one another, gentle and smooth, until Jacob can almost barely remember the angry, vibrating ravenstag who’d swooped down from the sky like an avenging angel and tried to kill him.

“Beautiful, right?” Newt murmurs.

“Yeah,” Jacob agrees. “Beautiful.”

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Day 18's prompt was "Mistletoe"! The original plot for that day when I started writing was legitimately in my notes as "but what if that's what people thought incubi where but in fact they weren't???" See you then!

Also, if you missed my previous chapter's note - real life is dumping all the crap onto me right now, so I'm gonna update two a day til I catch up. Hopefully that makes up for my absence!

# Mistletoe

Chapter Summary

Will's a Feeder who survives off of human dreams. Hannibal is the very tasty new food source he's quickly going addicted to.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: casual murders of people, dark!Will, and more Matthew Brown whump cuz I just like tearing him down

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It’s around the fourth or sixth or tenth time that Will finally realizes he’s in some rather deep trouble.

In his defense though, his kind do gorge themselves during the cold months, the ones humans call “holidays”, because so many people hang mistletoe everywhere and that is just asking for a Feeder to enter and start snacking. In the old days, they’d branded Will’s kind as incubi, demons and sorcerers, but while it’s true that some of Will’s more mischievous cousins did indeed sometimes have physical relations with those they fed upon, their main diet actually consists of energy, and the best way to get it is from dreams. Will adores feeding off people’s dreams. Everyone’s mind is so completely different yet so alike, like snowflakes falling in the night, and Will’s favorite time of day is when the sun sets and Feeders awaken from hibernation and start to pick dreamers to feed upon.

Will’s problem is that it’s not really safe to feed upon the same hosts night after night. Humans aren’t very good at remembering or recognizing the supernatural; play it just right and many just brush it off as strange dreams they forget in the morning. But if there’s a clear pattern, even the dumbest human can get a clue.

And Will, well. Will’s fed from this particular human for nearly two weeks in a row.

He just can’t help himself though. This human tastes *amazing*. He dreams so vividly, unlike any human Will’s ever known, and Will, who’s never eaten human food in his life or crossed the great ocean, has strolled down the streets of France and eaten gourmet meals and tasted meat so fresh it melted on his tongue. This human is a living banquet and Will became addicted the second he sunk his teeth into the human’s neck, curious about the man who lived alone with a secret basement.

Now Will knows exactly why this human has a secret basement, and in truth, it makes every meal even sweeter, to ride the adrenaline high of killing a worthless pig and triumph over lesser alphas who think themselves competition through reliving this human's dreams.

At the tenth time, though, Will can tell that this human is starting to grow some tolerance to the sweet, gentle poison his fangs slip into every meal, because even when Will disengages, the human starts to stir, and Will ends up freezing, half on the human and half off, until the human settles back down and he can scurry into the nearest shadow to teleport away.

Regretfully, Will licks his fangs. He's going to miss this human.

*Just one more,* he tells himself. *Just one tiny last feed. And then I'll leave. Just one. Surely it won't hurt.*

This rationalization comes to bite Will in the butt when, just as he sinks his fangs in and settles down for a nice long parting feed, the human beneath him shudders and comes awake with a gasp, eyes as red as the blood the drips in his dreams.

"Well, that's new," Will muses.

---

The human turns out to be called a really fitting pretentious name, which Will really should've guessed based on his ridiculously show-off house. "Hannibal Lecter," the man says, hand offered as though he thinks Will, who has been reliably told that he resembles a dirty feral child with sharp teeth and bright eyes, is going to actually shake it.

Will's teeth are still dripping with Hannibal's blood, for dreams' sake. Politeness is somewhat a foreign concept to Feeders.

"Yeah, I'm not calling you that," Will says after he tries and fails to say it a few times. Feeders look mostly human, but they don't communicate with verbal speech and his mouth isn't made for the twists and turns of human speech. "How about Hanni?"

The human looks like Will's just dunked him in the ocean. It's actually really funny.

"No."

"I could call you Human instead?"

" . . . Fine."

Hannibal, as it turns out, really isn't that angered to find out that Will's been sneaking into his house, sedating him with poison, and drinking his dreams. He's actually rather amused by it, and also equally really curious about what Will is and how his feeding works and all the science questions Will has no answers to.

"So you are the origin of the incubus myth, then?"

Will shrugs. "Maybe. Maybe not. Not like my kind has written records. Pretty sure there are some of my cousins' distant grandkids running around though."

“You’ve never tried it yourself?”

“Never felt the urge. Dreams were more than enough.”

Plus, you know, the whole exorcist and burn at the stake thing. It’s hard to catch a Feeder unawares, but if you do catch it, fire will most definitely kill them. Of course, so will prolonged exposure to sun and lack of access to food, but Will isn’t about to offer up “how to kill me” tips to a human serial killer, so he ends the story there.

Hannibal reaches up and prods gently at his neck, where the puncture wounds are still oozing. Will and his kind generally heal the wounds so humans don’t start asking the wrong questions, but Hannibal seems really fixated on them. The only problem is, of course, that Will’s teeth look nothing like a human’s, so if Hannibal started walking around with them and someone else noticed, there would definitely be problems. And not the “call a vampire hunter” problems either.

The “where other Feeders take notice” kind of problem.

Hannibal is Will’s and Will’s alone. He found him and he adores him and he won’t suffer smelling the scent of another Feeder’s poison sinking into his blood. As soon as Hannibal loses his tolerance to Will’s poison and starts to forget Will, Will’s going to come right back and indulge in his gloriously bloody and vivid dreams again.

He’s already counting down the seconds.

“I noticed a kind of . . . residue on my neck,” Hannibal explains when he notices Will’s gaze. “I assume that for the most part, whatever you use to heal traces of your work have no unintended side effects people would notice. But I have a much shorter sleep pattern than most humans. I usually only need around four to five hours.”

Delicious and concentrated. Will involuntarily licks his fangs again, because maybe he’s not starving, per se, but god, for one more taste of Hannibal’s dreams . . .

And then the human voluntarily, deliberately *bares his neck*. Like a damn sacrificial lamb.

“If you are still hungry,” Hannibal says, “you are welcome to feed. I have noticed no ill side effects as of yet. I imagine that whatever you are, you are unlikely to kill the host you feed upon, as you have no other method of sustaining your own life.”

“You have no idea what you’re offering,” Will warns.

Will’s never killed any human by feeding upon them. But that doesn’t mean humans can’t die. Will technically eats people’s dreams, but it funnels energy directly into his system, and there is such a thing as draining a human so far they have no energy left and die in the middle of feeding. Will’s been warned about it many times, since having a human host die on you is probably pretty damn traumatic.

Hannibal tilts his head. The damn human is so vulnerable to him in ways he can’t even comprehend – Will’s claws could rend him apart in seconds, not to mention he could just

drain all of his energy.

But he just sits there and smiles that stupid little smile of his.

Fortunately for the both of them, at that moment, the sun starts to come up, casting golden pinpricks of lights all over the room. It looks like fire, for a few brief moments, setting his human ablaze in a halo of light that shimmers all over the room, and for Will it's an unmistakable signal that it's time to vanish.

Will hops off the bed. "And look at that, time to go," he says hastily. "Bye!"

And with a simple sideways step into a shadow, he's gone.

---

It turns out that leaving was actually a pretty bad decision, because when Will comes back, drawn by the lure of one last feed, just one last one, just *one*, he finds Hannibal's house saturated by the signs of another Feeder.

Growling, he dashes up the stairs, only to find Hannibal trussed up in the bed, eyes rolled back in his head as Matthew sits atop his chest and drinks in deep lazy pulls from his neck.

Will instinctively unleashes his claws. "Get off."

Matthew takes another long pull, gulping down in clear satisfaction before he disengages, leaving long vicious marks on Hannibal's throat. Matthew's one of the Feeders who doesn't really care what happens to his prey, so he uses them hard and viciously until they perish or go catatonic and then he moves on. Will is certainly not yielding delicious, scrumptious Hannibal to that fate.

"You wouldn't deprive a cousin of such a lovely meal, now would you?"

"Finders keepers," Will tells him, because Feeders almost always back down over prior claims. Fighting would only reduce their numbers further. "This human is mine."

Matthew hums. "Yes, he did seem . . . rather surprised to see me. I was rather surprised that he could see me. And that he was strangely immune to my poison. Dearest Will, what have you been feeding this lovely little slab of meat?"

"Nothing. He came that way."

"Even better." Matthew's eyes gleam even as he settles more firmly atop Hannibal. "Run along, cousin. This one is mine now. I think our cousins deserve to know the kind of bounty we can get off this human. He could feed us for *ages*."

And, well, if Matthew wants to fight . . .

Feeders are not just dream-drinkers and human-predators. They are children of shadows and night, and their general manifestation is only half of what they are. Even as Will snarls, he lets his shadow expand, growing vicious long claws that drip deadly poison and racks of

antlers upon his back sharp enough to slice even the thinnest of shadows. Will's not afraid to fight. And he will get Hannibal back.

His transformation seems to startle Matthew. "Truly?"

"Hanni is MINE," Will says, loud enough that the shadows around them rattle. He found Hannibal, and no one else will have him, even if Will has to lock him up until he's weaned of his tolerance to Will's poison.

"Goodness, aren't you attached." Matthew sighs petulantly. "Very well. I suppose he's not worth dying over . . ."

In one swift movement, he raises his own claw and plunges it deep into Hannibal's gut. The pain wakens the human from his stupor, but all he can do is grunt as his life-blood starts to drain away, pooling red underneath his body to encase him in a sea of his own life-force. And their shadow-claws are tipped with poison; even if Hannibal could try and stitch himself up, their shadow-poison is enough to kill a human ten times over.

"Problem solved," Matthew says cheerfully. "Now there's nothing to fight – "

Will rips his head off with his teeth, but it's too late.

Hannibal's heart stops beating the moment Will reaches him.

---

For three days and nights, Will does not eat or leave Hannibal's side. He spins a cocoon of shadows and darkness, drawing energy from every dream Hannibal ever gave him, and smothers Hannibal from head to toe in shadowsilk fashioned from blood and twilight and nights with no stars. He wets the strands in Hannibal's own blood and guards it with his own body, even as the sun burns his fingers and the starvation begins to set in.

Will quite honestly isn't sure why he does this.

He was born from a cocoon, same as every Feeder, but his cocoon was of human flesh and dreamsilk, born from blood and sacrifice. Humans have long since stopped performing the rituals needed to call forth Feeders from the shadows.

Yet Will is driven on by instinct, so he continues. He repairs even the smallest breach, keeps the cocoon moist in blood, and hums the ancient songs.

And finally, on the fourth night, he is rewarded by the most unexpected thing of all.

The cocoon twitches, quite suddenly, dislodging a dozing Will. Starvation has long since robbed him of the ability to maintain his human illusion, so he sits atop his cocoon like a great antlered spider with gruesome claws, shielding it from the sun with his body. Except as it shakes violently, of course, he finds himself thrown clear of it.

"Hannibal?" Will whispers.

The cocoon goes completely still, just for a second, and then the struggles become even more renewed, stronger and fiercer.

“Hannibal,” Will calls, “Hannibal, come! Come out!”

First, a sharp claw emerges, poking through the cocoon like a needle through cloth, and then a hand, and then an arm, and then a leg. Bit by bit, something emerges, and it smells like danger and shadows and blood to Will’s senses, something like him but not, and it puts him on edge but he can’t leave. This is Hannibal, in some warped form, and he still smells delicious. Perhaps even more so, now that it has a side helping of *danger-danger-danger*.

And then Hannibal is through, stained with blood and dotted with strands of shadowsilk.

“Well,” Will says, eyeing his panting companion, “you are most certainly *not* a Feeder.”

---

It takes some research, but eventually Will digs some information out – quite literally, from a very reluctant older Feeder – ad figures out that the reasons Feeders were warned off focusing on one human for a long period of time is because tolerance only comes with transformation. It’s only a little bit, but with repeated infusions the humans eventually begin to truly change, and while most of them become fellow Feeders, some of them become something ever rarer.

“Figures you’d be the rarest damn thing on earth,” Will sighs.

Hannibal ignores him in favor of examining his newfound claws. He towers over Will now, with a great crown of sharp antlers, but he doesn’t have fangs at all. Will had originally found it strange, but now . . .

“He’s a Giver,” the older Feeder chokes out beneath Will’s claws. “A Dream Giver. They used to be so common, but now humans don’t put a priority on sleep, so they mostly died out. He can whisper to them in ways we never could.”

“Thanks,” Will says cheerfully, and then he lets Hannibal rip him apart with inhuman glee.

“I wonder how my abilities work,” Hannibal muses.

Will shrugs. “Don’t look at me. I’m a Feeder. I just sit on you and drink.”

Hannibal touches him, and just like the first time they touched, it’s the strangest burning sensation ever, like magnets at once automatically repulsed but irresistibly attracted. Will wants to run as far away from Hannibal as he can shadow-walk but also to hug him close and drain his energy all over again.

“May I try on you?”

“I don’t know if it’ll work the same way. I can’t feed from another Feeder.”

“But as you said,” Hannibal points out, “I am not another Feeder. I am a Giver. And I survive by giving dreams to others.”

Will tilts his head back. Hannibal willingly let him fed for days on end; he figures the least he can do is sit here while Hannibal attempts to figure out how to push dreams onto other beings.

And then the first dream hits, and every other thought goes clear out of his mind.

This isn't anything like feeding from a human.

It's a hundred, thousand, million times better.

Will gasps, thrown and dazed, as liquid energy is poured straight into his veins, tasting the saltiness of fresh scrambled eggs and the soft perfection of freshly baked croissants and the heart-pumping high of fresh brewed coffee. The most mundane of dreams for someone like Hannibal, but from a Giver it's so much stronger than anything he'd ever drank from any human before.

*Maybe this is why they let the Givers die out,* Will thinks dazedly. Why would any Feeder bother to seek out human prey if they could just sit here and drink from a Giver directly?

"It would probably unbalance the ecosystem," Hannibal says.

"Shut up and give me more dreams."

"Could you survive off of me? Even as I am now?"

"I don't see why not," Will says, because his head's clear and he feels refreshed now, all of his starvation cleared away in one dose. He gains energy from drinking and Hannibal from giving; perhaps they are nature's true symbiotic pair.

Hannibal draws him close. "Excellent," he purrs. "I would not have shared you with anyone."

Will bites at him playfully, making Hannibal gasp and go rigid as Will starts to feed from his neck, tasting the sweet calm of stalking prey and the adrenaline rush of a fresh kill. "Addicting" doesn't even come somewhat close to explaining how much he wants Hannibal's dreams right now.

Yeah, Will thinks they're going to be just fine.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Day 19's prompt was "Stocking"! It involves monsters and beds :D

I was going for a kind of theme that Dream Feeders like Will find it easier to enter when mistletoe is around cuz mistletoe is a parasitic plant and Will's a sort of parasite monster.

I'm not sure how well that came across, but that was my ORIGINAL intent. Clearly it got waaaaay out of my control lol.

# Stocking

Chapter Summary

Hannibal may be the monster under Will's bed, but Will is most certainly not afraid of him.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: three or four mentions of child abuse (verbal and physical), and people getting burned alive. yeah, it gets kinda dark here, folks

This was also inspired by this "Monster Under My Bed" post, and I'm pretty sure someone else has already written one but I figured why not try my own take on it because I lost where the original one was. My bad

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first time Will starts getting inklings of what's going on, it's because there's a stocking out of place.

No one else really notices, because all of the Family's stockings are hung in their proper place, by the mantel. Will's stocking is really just a dirty old sock, worn out by the Master's son and taped at the base of his little cot. But Will religiously keeps it clear and clean, and somehow from morning to night it's been moved to underneath his cot. And it's not like anyone else enters Will's room, which is really just a little alcove in the attic with a curtain and an old moth-eaten sofa to serve as barriers.

So Will says, "I'm not afraid of you, monster."

There's only silence to greet him, but it's a different kind of silence. Like holding your breath kind of silence, rather than natural silence of blowing wind and absent bodies.

And like magic, a shadowy figure unfolds itself from under Will's bed. It's so large it nearly bumps the ceiling, with two great striking antlers emerging from its forehead, legs bent backwards like a deer, a ring of feathers around its neck and midsection, and great unsettling red eyes.

Then the monster speaks. "How strange. You do not smell of fear."

Will shrugs. Between his empathy and the past week he's had, the definition of "monster" has sort of lost its mystery for Will. "After the past two, I figured there would be more."

"Indeed. Garret and Tobias spoke highly of you."

Garret must have been the walking dead man, armed with a fake gun and a creepy smile with bullet holes bleeding blood. Will had looked at him and told him the gun was fake and his smile didn't have the heart in it. It had earned him a laugh and a real smile. Tobias had been the monster under the sheet, casting strange shadows and whipping wires to make strange sounds, but strange sounds aren't nearly as scary to Will as the ones he knows very well, so he'd just rolled over and slept.

This monster is different though. Garret and Tobias had been human shaped, even if vaguely so. This one doesn't look remotely human, except for the part where it's bipedal and has four limbs.

"What's your name?" Will asks politely, because his father always told him to be polite.

A wide wound spreads across the monster's face, and Will blinks before he realizes it's the monster's version of a smile. "I am called Hannibal, little one."

"Well, it's not much here," Will murmurs. "You should probably move on. You won't scare me."

"Ah," says Hannibal, curling over Will to breathe hot and heavy on his neck, "that is not how I work, little one. I do not scare you. I ensure that you scare yourself."

And with those cryptic words, he vanishes.

Still, when Hannibal turns out the next night, Will gives him exactly one second glance before he shoves him off the bed in favor of collapsing on it himself, groaning as he takes weight off his aching feet. Most of the ache comes from standing on his feet and moving around boxes for the Master's son, who is soon to go off to college, but a good deal more of it comes from when the Mistress, annoyed at his slow pace, had beaten the soles of his feet for his disobedience.

"You are limping," the monster observes, tone flat.

Will nods into his little stack of old towels, which now serve as his pillows. It's nothing new, and at least it was only his feet. Sometimes the Master takes a ruler to his knuckles, and that hurts for days.

"You are not alarmed."

"I was . . . slow. Today. I'm not usually," Will adds, wondering why he's trying to justify himself to the monster who doesn't care.

There's more hot breaths at his back as the monster gets close and takes several deep whiffs. Technically, Will is trapped under the cage of the monster's arms and legs, but right now Will

feels only weariness and a faint resignation. Let Hannibal do what he will. It can't be worse than the Master or Mistress on a bad day.

Then the monster does something very strange indeed; he strokes down Will's bruised, aching soles with his claws, and slowly the pain fades, right along with the bruises.

"How – "

"You were not slow," Hannibal says, crouching back on his heels like some strange antlered cat. "I watched you, today. I have been watching you. You are kind and gentle and swift, little one. You did not deserve punishment from those monsters."

Will blinks. Usually his empathy is pretty good, but . . . "I didn't know they were monsters."

Hannibal's eyes glitter as he extends himself, curling around Will like a great hot blanket. Somehow even his sharp claws are gentle as they pull blankets around Will and tuck him in like a baby. "Not my kind of monster, dearest," Hannibal says. "The human kind."

"Oh. I knew that."

"Is that why you feel no fear of me?"

Will nods. He would talk – it's only polite – but he's just so *tired* right now, and Hannibal is so warm and the blanket is so soft . . .

"Come with me," Hannibal says suddenly, and now Will is definitely awake.

"I can't."

"And why is that? These people are meant to care for you as their own, and feed you and clothe you and house you. Instead they take the money meant for you and rain blows upon your hands and feet."

Will shuts his eyes. Laid bare like that, it brings a rush of hot shame to his throat. His father had always warned him against accepting charity, but his father is gone now, and Will had had no choice but to be taken in by the state and auctioned off to the highest bidder, just to get away from the terrible conditions of the orphanage. It's not much better here and Will has a long way to go before he's free, but sometimes, just sometimes, it's better with the devil you know.

"I am no devil," Hannibal murmurs, sounding delighted at the comparison. "I would cherish you like the treasure you are."

"The Master would get in trouble."

"And I should care why?"

Will swallows. He doesn't have much of dignity these days – how can he, when he digs for scraps out of the garbage and makes his bed with worn-out, stained towels – but he still has a tiny bit of a moral compass. He can't help but feel sorry for the Master and Mistress, so

insecure that everything becomes an attempt to prove their superiority, and he doesn't want to bring down the state on their head. They would collapse under the pressure.

Hannibal sighs. "Oh, my Will," he says. "What a gift you have, and you squander it on these fools."

"I can't."

"I know, my little one, I know."

Hannibal kisses his forehead and curls around him again, a warm defense against the chill of the night, and for a moment, Will thinks all has been forgotten. He wonders, if only briefly, when Hannibal will leave, now that Will is no longer going to be a source of entertainment.

Instead, Hannibal suddenly says, "Will."

"Hmm?"

The monster produces a little lump of coal, glittering even in the darkness, and lays it on the bed between them. "If you change your mind, use this to call me."

"What is it?" Will asks. The coal is so cold it almost burns Will's fingers, but inside it reflects the flames of a great and consuming fire, all bound up tight in this tiny little piece of coal. Everything about it is dangerous and beautiful and mesmerizing, and Will almost wants to never use it, so that he might never lose its beauty.

"A way to call me," the monster answers. "Sleep now, my Will. I will come when you call."

---

Will does not call the next day or the day after that or the day after that. In fact, an entire month passes.

But then, on Christmas, for the crime of waking up too early to start breakfast preparations for the enormous feast for the Master's children, Will is beaten in the kitchen and denied breakfast altogether. When his stomach rumbles, the Master's son laughs and the Mistress makes him stand in the corner and whacks his legs until he can barely stand.

And something in Will just – snaps.

He's never going to be part of this family, he realizes. Never. His monthly payment went towards another new coat for the Mistress and another laptop the Master's son doesn't need, yet Will is denied even the basics of one piece of bread, his usual breakfast.

While the Family opens presents, Will stumbles slowly to his room and picks up the lump of coal, which seems even brighter now. Carefully, he makes his way down the stairs and carries it into the living room, sitting down amongst all the presents that are not for him and watching the way the Master grows irritated with his presence.

"What are you doing here, Boy?" he finally snaps.

Will doesn't look up. "I'm waiting."

The Master's daughter chimes in before her father can order Will away. "Look, Papa, he's got a lump of coal!" she laughs, bright and pretty like frost in the dawn. "He's been a bad boy! Santa gave him coal!"

"Oh, this didn't come from Santa," Will says with a smile.

The Master snorts. "You went and dug coal out of the garbage? What a useless boy, why did we even take you in?"

Will looks up and examines all the luxury of the life he can never have and now realizes he doesn't want. He doesn't want to be part of this rude family. He'll be alone for the rest of his days, maybe, but it'll be worth it.

"This coal isn't for me," Will announces. "It's for you."

And he rolls the coal into the middle of the room, where it stops, trembles, and then, quite suddenly, bursts into flame. The Master bellows, the Mistress screams, the Master's son scrambles, the Master's daughter yelps. They all throw water and run around, but there is nothing to be done. Their doors and windows hold fast, and every drop of water makes the fire blaze faster and higher, swallowing their precious pretentious artwork and gourmet organic food and everything they'd ever adorned their luxurious house with.

The flames do not touch Will, and neither does any member of the Family.

---

When it's over, leaving only ashes and the echoes of screams, Will feels that same unnatural silence again before his monster materializes.

"Hello, Will."

Will sighs. "I will miss you," he confesses. But there's nothing he can do. He used Hannibal's favor to free himself, and he doesn't regret it, not really, but still. Being alone is a terrible thing, even if Will's always been alone, and he will miss this strangely gentle, terrifying monster who's come to Will for night after night to heal his wounds and sing him to sleep and tuck him in.

Hannibal's arms lift him to his feet. "What makes you think I am going anywhere?"

"But I used up your coal."

"So you did," Hannibal concedes. But his eyes sparkle with mischief as he speaks, and hope begins to rise in Will's tired, weary heart. "But, my darling, don't you know? I am assigned to you until I successfully scare you or I pass the case on. And I have a feeling you are going to be a very difficult case to crack."

"Oh," Will says, and nothing else, because his mouth is suddenly frozen.

It's okay though.

Hannibal knows, and gently he picks Will up and carries him away, neither of them once looking back upon the destruction Hannibal has wrought in Will's name.

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**Many Years Later**

When Will trudges back from Verger's farm to his house to find an unharmed Hannibal and a very crazy Mason, the first thing he does is slap his monster in the face.

"You scared me!"

Hannibal tests his jaw – Will's grown strong, mostly because he spars with true monsters now – but his smile is as strong as always when he turns back around. "No, I did not," Hannibal replies.

Will can't help his own smile. It's been their exchange since Will was a small child, attempting to release Hannibal from his entrapment only to find out that Hannibal didn't really want to be released and never truly committed to trying to scare Will. Every once in a while, Will offers Hannibal a chance to be free, but Hannibal never takes it.

And besides. Hannibal would never die at the hands of a crazy man feeding him to pigs.

It'd be too undignified for Hannibal.

Hannibal takes his hands and kisses him, gentle and fierce as he always is. "Welcome home, my Will. Now what shall we do with this one?"

"He's your patient," Will says with a shrug, because "patient" is a running joke between them about side cases Hannibal takes on to scare the living daylights out of humans who think they are monsters. "You do what you think is best."

With a truly fearful smile, Hannibal gets to work.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Day 20's prompt was "Carols"! I think it's another angel!AU. And Day 21's prompt is "Christmas Tree", and I'm going to be drawing from some of the lists of sentence prompts that were floating around Tumblr. See you then!

Um, also, that random "Many Years Later" scene takes place in Digestivo, after Will wakes up and we all thought for one teeny tiny second that maybe Hannibal got fed to the pigs. Cuz I just WANTED to see Will come back and be like "YOU JUST LEFT ME ON THE PLATFORM THINKING YOU WERE DEAD YOU A-HOLE".

# Carols

Chapter Summary

Will hasn't heard a song like that since he fell from Heaven. So of course the next day an elaborately posed corpse turns up.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: casual discussion of murder, plus discussion of war and Hannibal and Will wounding each other

Can you tell I like angel!AUs, folks??? (I blame Castiel. And Misha Collins.) Oh and a dash of reincarnation!AU too.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first time Will hears the singing, he thinks he's mistaken. Will hasn't heard the carols of his brothers and sisters in ages, not since first great war that tore the Host apart and sent so many of them plummeting to the ground, wings singed and hope lost in the wake of the fall of the most beautiful of them all.

Will had fought in the battles and lost hope like all the rest. Eventually he had quietly slipped away, the way a small handful had, to live a quiet lonely life among the humans he found himself entirely indifferent to.

And yet.

And yet that is most definitely the song of an angel Will is hearing right now, because it's too faint for any human to ever pick up on it. It sounds like the siren call of home, and Will is incredibly tempted to respond in kind or even take flight, because no angels were ever meant to sing alone. But Will holds back, for to abandon heaven is probably the greatest crime of all in the eyes of the Host, and Will has no intention of uprooting his life yet again simply because someone came hunting for those who wandered away from Michael.

So Will does not go, instead staying home to pet his dogs and tie his lures.

The next day, a man is found dead in a church, tongue severed and placed as a bookmark in a Bible.

Will notices a pattern soon after that. The songs are rare, only a few here and a few there, but every single time, without fail, a body turns up soon afterwards. And not just any dead body, either, ones that are elaborately posed and delicately decorated and always a joke on many different levels. It is the most gruesome art Will's ever seen.

Beautiful, but gruesome.

And then Jack calls Will in to speak to a "consultant".

"Ha – " Will nearly bites his tongue off. His brother might be wearing a newly fashioned vessel, completely different from the long-haired, tattooed knight he first possessed when he descended from Heaven, but Will knows him as surely as he knows the weight of his sword in his hand and the wings that mantle on his back.

His brother's jaw works when Will snaps his mouth shut, and it would be such a small reaction to a human's eyes.

The way his brother's wings flex tell an entirely different story.

"You two know each other?" Jack asks, eyeing them with suspicion because everything Jack Crawford does is with a probably unhealthy dose of suspicion.

Will forces a smile. "I – I've heard of you. Hannibal Lecter, right?"

"Indeed," Hannibal says, and his voice is still accented because Hannibal never quite manage to moderate his vessel's voice right. Or perhaps because he didn't care about letting parts of his true voice shine through. With Hannibal, either could be equally true. "And you are Will Graham."

Will honestly doesn't remember how he gets through that meeting. And considering that angels have perfect recall, that's really saying something.

Yet it doesn't really matter, in the end. Will makes it exactly four steps into the parking lot after taking off at a dead run the second he was away from Jack's door before he hears the flap of mighty wings and Hannibal appears in front of him, seizes his arm, and flings him through space and time with all the strength of the archangel he is. Will flails his own wings, trying to find balance, and only manages to knock over a sizeable antler decoration when he lands tumbling head over heels.

"Ioael."

Will's wings snap out and knock over a side table. He can't help it; no one's said his true name in so long . . . "Halaliel," he snaps, because if Hannibal wants to play this game then Will'll play.

Hannibal visibly shudders, and his wings cast great long shadows on the floor as he stretches them to their full length before he gets himself back under control. In the first days, Will might have teased his unchecked reaction, but he doesn't quite think it's appropriate

considering that he tried to push Hannibal into a black hole, Hannibal gutted him in return, and they both fell from Heaven in the end anyways.

“You are weaker than I remember.”

“And you stronger.” Will struggles to his feet. “How have you managed to hide from Heaven?”

Hannibal blinks. “The Host has far bigger problems to worry about than one missing soldier,” he replies. “You should know that; stealth never was your strength, Ioael, and yet here you stand, unbound and alive, not a single feather harmed by the Host.”

“They presumed that I died.”

“I did too,” Hannibal says, voice so casual that he’s managed to walk all the way to the kitchen before the words register with Hannibal.

Will watches, lingering in the doorway, as Hannibal slices up the meat and kneads the dough, each movement art in motion. Hannibal always was so beautiful in movement, crackling fire with every gesture and feather flick, expending exactly no less and no more than what was required to get things done. On the battlefield, it had made him a warrior to be reckoned with, and when Hannibal had offered to guide Will he had jumped at the chance.

Hannibal’s wings are still as beautiful as that day, glimmering in the light of the garden, blue-white like the burning core of the brightest stars.

“I looked for you,” Hannibal begins, methodically stirring a sauce. “I looked and looked and looked. I took countless mortals as vessels to search for you. I never gave up hope. And then, finally in some little town in Albion, I found you. And you did not believe you. You forgot me. You would not listen.”

It’s like watching grainy footage of days past. Will had forgotten he remembered those days.

Those days are the days of shame.

Back then, Will had believed himself a true knight, fighting just long enough to be free from his contract before he could hurry home. And then he had met his comrades and fought with them until they became his family, and he became a blade honed as fine as a razor’s edge.

He remembers exactly when Tristan came to him and brought him to a great towering tree and asked him to touch it and willed him to remember.

Will had only taken his advice after Tristan had died.

“I was afraid,” Will says. “We were brothers on the opposite sides of the war. I thought you might prefer me ignorant, if ever our paths were to cross again.”

Hannibal’s knife slips and scores the cutting board. His wings flex and mantle and stretch, long enough to swallow Will whole and strong enough to destroy him in a second. He is as beautiful as Will remembers, even caged in human flesh and restrained by human

sensibilities. If Will were a human, he would still open his eyes, for to see Hannibal's true beauty – even to lose his eyes and ears for it – would be worth it.

"I wasn't angry about the side you chose, Ioael," Hannibal murmurs. "I was angry that you did believe you had a choice."

"We all made bad decisions."

Hannibal reaches out and rests one palm heavily against Will's wing. It's warm and comforting and so alien he nearly shakes it off out of instinct. But this is Hannibal – the angel who had carried him home from the battlefield and soothed his wounds and shielded him from demons. If anyone's earned the right to touch his wings, it's Hannibal.

"Make one more, for me," Hannibal pleads.

"I can't let you keep killing humans, Halaliel."

"Just one more. You owe me."

"Halaliel . . ."

"One human lifetime," Hannibal bargains. "Just one. Just one lifetime, my Ioael, you cannot be so heartless as to deny me one lifetime."

Will thinks of the dead victim, the man so rude his wife had wept with joy at the news of his passing. Will thinks of the dead man, lying splayed on the battlefield with a sword in one hand and blank eyes. Will thinks of the last great war, when he had tackled Hannibal and pushed him straight over the edge, determined to die at last and end the suffering. Will thinks of the first time they had met, when everything was still new, and Hannibal had said, "What is your name, brother?" and Will had said "I do not know" and Hannibal had wrapped him tenderly in silks and preened his wings and brought him before Michael.

Will thinks of the first time he had touched Hannibal's wings, those beautiful blue-white fire wings.

"One lifetime," he relents, and Hannibal sags as Will had when Hannibal had gutted him mid-battle. "One lifetime, and no more."

"I will find you again."

"Maybe you will."

Underneath, Will whispers, *I hope you will*. He knows Hannibal will hear it.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

The prompt for Day 21 is "Christmas Tree"! It involves a sentence prompt that tickled my fancy on Tumblr.

From my Googling adventures: Halaliel (aka Hannibal) is the archangel of karma and Ioael is the angel of visions (aka Will). I figured those were pretty fitting for them.

# Christmas Tree

Chapter Summary

> "Listen, I am genetically modified and on the run and you *will* let me hide in behind your Christmas tree."

Chapter Notes

> Warnings: implied abuse/torture and dehumanization, plus casual Hannibal being his usual cannibal murder self, and some dark murder-y Will too
>
> This was inspired by this collection of sentence prompts.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Waking up to the unfamiliar scent of an intruder in his house is not exactly Hannibal's idea of a good day. Being unable to actually find said intruder despite the heavy and distinct wet-fur smell that the intruder gives off makes his mood even worse, and with each passing hour, Hannibal finds his plans growing ever more elaborate as to what to do with his unwelcome guest.

And then Hannibal, pacing through the living room for the fifth time with a knife in one hand and a phone in the other, decides on a passing whim to look up.

"Um," says the half-naked man clinging to the ceiling with a long fluffy tail and soft black-tipped ears.

Matters do not get any better when there is some very rude and loud banging on his door, which makes Hannibal arch an eyebrow at his intruder, who most certainly fits the bill of someone the authorities would be looking for. This apparently sets off the cat-man, however, since he flips over and lands smoothly on his feet, coming straight up to Hannibal's face to snarl, "Listen, I am genetically modified and on the run and you *will* let me hide in behind your Christmas tree."

"Or else?" Hannibal asks dryly.

The cat-man hisses and pops a few claws. It looks more painful for him to reveal them but he makes the best of it. "Or else I'll just kill you and hide us both."

Underneath wet fur, the cat-man smells like warm chocolate, sharp raspberries, and fresh pine trees. His hair is a mass of untamed and unruly curls, his eyes are so very bright blue, and his entire body vibrates with tension to go with the absolute murder that shines in his eyes. He is absolutely gorgeous, in every sense of the word.

Hannibal lets him hide behind the Christmas tree.

---

Afterwards, Hannibal cooks French toast, pancakes, bacon, waffles, and scrambled eggs, because he isn't quite sure what this cat-man wants, but he's inexplicably charmed with it turns out that Will, who mumbles his name in between shoveling food down his gut, has never had any of those foods and wants to try everything.

Hannibal thinks back to cold dark nights and voiceless years, and advises Will to eat more slowly.

Eventually, once the frantic eating dies down, Will unashamedly sprawls out in a patch of sunshine on top of a rug in the living room, purring faintly. Hannibal follows, his own breakfast forgotten, and is alternately distracted by the glowing skin and concerned by the very visible ribs in Will's midsection.

"Why did you choose a Christmas tree to hide behind?" Hannibal asks eventually.

Will's ears flicker, just slightly, but he doesn't open his eyes. Apparently he's decided Hannibal is not a threat. "We were all given certain scent markers," he says in between huge yawns. "To make us easier to track. I was given pine."

Hannibal inhales again. The pine is indeed very strong, even for a human; to a dog, it must be a flaming beacon. "I also smell raspberries and chocolate," he says, because Will had shown no reaction to either the raspberries Hannibal had included in the fruits or chocolate spread he laid out as Will tore through his breakfast.

"What's a raspberry?"

---

Will is not a terrible houseguest to live with. It's true that he has no sense of decency or manners and refuses point-blank to take a shower when he can bathe himself with a sponge and likes to steal Hannibal's bathrobes to make little nests in patches of sunshine, but he also eagerly devours every morsel of food Hannibal presents, don't leave much of a mess besides the aforementioned nests, is religiously careful with any book he takes out of the library, and is quiet enough that Hannibal sometimes really does need to take a second look in his own house to find Will.

His story, on the other hand, is a completely different ball game and comes out in bits and pieces.

Slowly, Hannibal learns of the existence of a lab, where Will was born some twenty odd years ago. He never met his mother or anyone else, and spent his days in a cramped tiny cat

cage where feedings were rare to limit the times the cages would need to be cleaned of waste. If he did anything other than exactly what he was ordered, pain was applied immediately.

Will also despises lab coats. Hannibal disposes of his few remaining ones from his days in surgery with little regret.

The only downside of having Will as a houseguest is that he spends so much time at home now instead of hunting that he finds his freezer, for once, running quite low by his standards, and when he goes through his rolodex to find new candidates he gets distracted five different times by watching Will sleep on the floor, tail tip twitching as he dreams.

He can't help it though. With regular baths to clean the dirt and regular meals to fill his belly, Will is beautiful. Dozing in the sun now, he is all golden skin and chocolate curls and soft fluffy ears and tail. Hannibal's never been one for pets, but every time he sees Will, he wants to hold him close and pet those soft black-tipped ears.

Instead, he tells Will he'll be coming home and goes hunting.

---

Hannibal comes to home to an incredibly nonverbal sulking cat-man on his bed.

"Will, I need to get under the sheets to sleep."

Will curls up further – really, Hannibal has no idea how his spine works to allow for such a tight ball of arms and legs and tail – and refuses to budge. He had refused to eat the dinner Hannibal had so carefully prepared for him, had refused the offer of a new bathrobe or cashmere sweater to nest in, and now refuses to get off the middle of the bed where he's already kneaded some holes with his claws.

"Will," Hannibal tries again.

Will hisses at him. And it's not like Will's never made cat noises before, because he's certainly yowled (it took four apologies and a freshly steamed fish for Will to forgive him for accidentally stepping on his tail), meowed (the first time Hannibal had brought home fish), and purred (the first time Hannibal gave him his oldest, softest sweater for his slowly growing nest). But he's never hissed like this, ears laid flat against his skull, claws out, and tail all fluffed out and every hair on end.

Hannibal goes for his last resort. "Kitten," he says, "please let me at least get into bed. You can cuddle with me afterwards."

"Don't wanna," Will mutters.

"Want to, not 'wanna', kitten."

"Shut up."

"Will."

Eventually, after a great dealing of pulling and coaxing and more pulling, Will begrudgingly shifts over just enough for Hannibal to get in his own damn bed, although it takes another half an hour wherein Hannibal resorts to actually promising different breakfast food combinations until Will finally comes to curl up against him, his tail a soft fluffy circle around Hannibal's leg.

"What's wrong, Will?" Hannibal asks, petting at the very tense shoulders of his cat-man.

Will snuffles into his stomach, but his shoulders are still rigid and his ears are still slanted back, so Hannibal controls his laughter.

"You were late," Will sulks.

"I needed to get more food. I mustn't forget to feed you."

"I'm not a pet."

Hannibal kisses his head and barely contains a smile at the scent of the shampoo Will always insists he never borrows from Hannibal. "No, you are not. But you are my guest. And it is my duty to ensure that you are warm and clean and fed and happy. So. Why are you truly not happy, kitten?"

"You're . . . You're planning to get rid of me," Will blurts out.

Hannibal pauses. He's made no such indications, to his recollection. He's never even *though* about it. "Whatever gave you that idea?"

"I found the emancipation papers. In your drawer."

Hannibal holds back the lecture on snooping and privacy. He supposes he really has no grounds to stand on, given the pig he so carefully tracked and the length digging he's done into Will's background. "Will, kitten," Hannibal says, "I did not commission those to 'get rid of you'. I commissioned them so that one day, if you wish, you may walk out of this house and hold your head up high as a person. Verger Labs will never be able to take you back once I receive confirmation of those papers."

"I . . . never told you that name."

"You came to me for protection," Hannibal says simply. "I made it my business to know."

Will peers shyly up at him. His tail is still so soft and gentle around Hannibal's leg, but his ears have finally pricked up and his shoulders are relaxed as Hannibal touches him. "But I don't want to leave you," he protests.

"Then stay," Hannibal offers, fighting hard to keep his voice calm. What he really wants to do is cook or compose or perhaps hug Will so close his kitten squeaks and flails his tail like he does whenever Hannibal gives him a new sweater or bathrobe to cuddle, but he understands that he must give Will time. Choice is important to Will, and Hannibal will always give choice to Will above all else.

“You really don’t mind?”

“I would happily feed you for the rest of your days,” Hannibal tells him, and he can tell from the way Will purrs that he hears the truth in Hannibal’s unchanging heartbeat.

“I forgive you,” Will declares, sprawling all over Hannibal’s body like he’s some kind of body pillow.

Hannibal allows it. After all, he gets to keep this beautiful, wonderful, perfect being with the eyes of an angel and a will of iron by his side, to pet his ears and curl around him in sleep and keep him fed – what else could he possibly want?

---

After six months, they celebrate the final confirmation of Will’s paperwork. As the icing on the cake, Hannibal shows Will a certain Verger Lab head tied up in his basement.

Will is not surprised about the basement; he has a keen nose and very good hearing, and Hannibal’s fairly certain Will has deliberately claimed some of his clothes in order to rub his scent all over them and drown out any scent of cleaners or blood.

At the sight of Mason Verger, however, Will forgets his words and trills so loud in excitement Hannibal almost covers his ears.

“All yours, kitten,” he tells Will proudly.

Will pops a claw, grinning from ear to ear. “Help me?” he purrs, arching against Hannibal’s back with his soft ears rubbing against Hannibal’s cheek and his fluffy tail gently wrapped around Hannibal’s wrist.

“Always,” Hannibal says, and together they descend on the pig.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

The prompt for Day 22 is "Holiday Music/Movies"! I don't really have an idea for that so we'll see what happens lol. And the prompt for Day 23 is "Candy Cane", and I DO have an idea for that and it will involve a fandom I got into thanks to an amazing movie that dropped this year :D See you then!

Also ScreamingEgg asked a while back for other random little books I enjoyed, so here's a quick list off the top of my head:
- The Squire's Tales series by Gerald Morris = it's a cool twist on Arthurian legend involving faeries and the humor is awesome and it brings up some very interesting points about family, duty, gender roles, the line between love and obsession, and also how much it must suck when you travel back from a faerie realm and everyone thinks

you're dead.
- The Chanters of Tremaris by Kate Constable = It's a series about a world control elements/cool powers by SINGING. How cool is that?? Like if you're an ice chanter, you can bring up snow and ice; but there are like nine or so powers, so you can also sing for wind, animals, iron, fire, illusions, etc. The romance is a little stiff and teenage-angst sometimes, but the ideas about chantments and singing are amazing.
- The Sisters Grimm by Michael Buckley = Kinda like Once Upon A Time & Grimm the tv show, a little, wherein two orphaned sisters learn they are descendants of the Brothers Grimm and have to learn to keep the peace in a tiny town where storybook characters live, but it's so interesting to see it from the eyes of children instead of adults, plus some of the characters have really interesting new twists and turns for their stories
- Bonemender Trilogy by Holly Bennet = It involves elves and magic and princesses, yeah, but princesses who get s**t done when times get tough. And are also pretty good doctors for medieval times too.
I thoroughly enjoyed all of these books, so if you're interested I suggest checking them out. I already have an idea for a Chanters of Tremaris AU, but we'll see if or when it materializes. And if you have any series to suggest to me, please do share, I LOVE finding new books to read (and make Hannigram or other OTP AUs of) :D

# Author's Note

To anyone wondering why this collection is now listed as on hiatus = here is why. I hope you can understand and give me some time to get myself together again. This collection WILL be completed at some point, I promise.

# Day 22: Holiday Music/Movies

Chapter Summary

> Will's soulmate mark reads: "Here Comes Santa Claus". Needless to say, his hopes aren't exactly very high for finding his soulmate.

Chapter Notes

> Warnings: Uh . .. . . some angst cuz it's Will and Hannibal having their normal great first impressions, but otherwise nothing
>
> This was inspired by the gorgeous "Here Comes Hannibal" song rolling around on tumblr. And also cuz my muse up and decided it wanted to do a soulmate!AU.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The saying goes that everyone is excited and full of joy when their soulmate mark appears on their skin.

Will has several objections to this supposedly “universal” statement. For one thing, a soulmate mark can appear almost anywhere on someone’s skin. *Anywhere.* Will bets that people who get the mark on their back are maybe not so full of joy, because then they have to either read it with a mirror or get someone else to read it. Or the people who get marks on their feet or toes or elbows probably aren’t happy either. For another, soulmate marks appear when your soulmate is born, but there’s no guarantee you’ll be born with within a respectable time. What if your soulmate is three decades younger than you? What if you’re at the beginning of your life and your soulmate is dying? And finally but most importantly: what if you have a really crappy mark?

Take, for example, Will’s mark. When he’d goes to get it registered like everyone else, he definitely hear the way his attendant tries and fails to contain a laugh.

Not that he blames her.

“Here Comes Santa Claus” doesn’t exactly scream magical or amazing or soul-mate-y.

“I’m just going to move your mark under the ‘holiday music/movies’ categories, okay, honey,” the attendant says once she gets over her laughter. “That will make it easier to retrieve when you come back with your soulmate for verification.”

Will curls back into his coat and tries not to snort in derision. “Verification” is a fancy way of saying that the Bureau of Arrangements and Unions doesn’t want to get sued again by someone else hacking into the records, getting a tattoo of someone else’s soulmate mark, and tricking said person into thinking they were their soulmate. It’s only happened a handful of times, since soulmate marks are durable in ways no tattoo ever could be, but each and every time is a stain on their record.

“Hey.” The attendant looks at him, face softening. Her mark is a faint scribble on her wrist – a short phrase, easily seen, a lucky person indeed. “Hey, kid, don’t worry too much. You could have been in the generic service category.”

Will says nothing, because what could he say? Yeah, there are a lot of poor schmucks with the standard “How can I help you?” and “What’s your name?” and “Hello” and “Sorry” and “Thank you”. There are even more with phrases or cut off sentences from people who brush past each other or music notes for people who meet with the end of a stage between them. Yeah, their lives probably do all suck too.

But Will’s had his words branded on his stomach since he was born. They’re stark and visible and he can’t hide them. So right now he doesn’t really care about those poor people in generic service.

So he just gives a forced smile and runs away as fast as he can.

---

Will turns nineteen and graduates from high school. He’s been held back due to constant school switching thanks to his dad and his natural avoidant tendencies. The long sleeves are as much to hide his mark as his bruises, and he’s pretty sure no one buys it.

Two soulmates meet right in front of him, a classmate and a guest speaker. It’s a scandal.

---

Will turns twenty-one and gets royally, totally, completely drunk. After watching alcohol consume his father, he’d tried to stay away, but eventually he gives in because what’s the worst that can happen? Eternally being alone? He’s already slated for that.

When he calls for food, desperate and hungover, his delivery guy bumps into one of his floormates. Their eyes light up.

At least Will gets free pizza.

---

Will turns twenty-three and graduates from college in the middle of December. They play “Here Comes Santa Claus” during the party and Will doesn’t even flinch.

---

Will turns twenty-seven and is having his private birthday celebration when Beverly calls him in a panic begging him to cover for a coworker who’s called out. He hasn’t worked at Crawford’s in about two months since he got a full-time internship, but he liked the pace, liked his friends, and liked the money, so he shrugs and says yes. Not like his birthday

celebration was anything amazing, after all, just some doggie treats for Winston and Zoe and a quiet night of snoozing by the fire.

Still, he's not at all amused by the pile of nametags he gets to choose from.

"Really, Bev?" he asks, squinting at each one, which all have very bad handwriting. "Jingle Bells? Santa Clause Is Coming To Town? Silent Night?"

Beverly shrugs. She's already got her festive elf hat pinned cheerily to her hair, and her nametag is neatly decorated with little drawings strings of lights and wreaths. "Boss man said it would help make people to remember their own nametags so they wouldn't have to wear the embarrassing ones."

She's not wrong, but it's not like Will kept his old nametag.

However, the rules of Crawford's are very clear. Employees must wear uniforms and must wear nametags, so Will has to get a nametag, and they don't have a spare blank one anymore. Will just picks one of the horrible song ones at random and pins it to his chest with a sigh.

Will ends up manning the bar, and it's actually not that bad. The singer crooning tonight is passable and the music is nice, and pretty soon about three hours have passed before he knows it.

"It's not that bad tonight, is it?"

Beverly shakes her head. "Nah, gets busier later, when the opera gets outs."

"The opera?" Will mimes rubbing his ear. They've all gotten used to lip-reading or guess-estimating what other people are saying when Crawford's gets noisy, but he must be more out of tune with Beverly than he thought.

Beverly laughs. "No, you heard me right, Graham," she teases. "The opera. Crawford's been cozying up to some really big hotshots over there, and apparently some of them are willing to come over here and drop some money after a show. Get a drink, chat it out, and always have the option of ducking out the back door to escape if they want."

And, well, apparently Crawford's efforts are paying off, since some patrons dressed in very fancy clothing do show up not too long afterwards.

Thankfully, they all seem to mostly be polite and no one comments on his slightly messy uniform.

That is, until –

"Here Comes Santa Claus?"

Will isn't even aware of dropping the glass and rag he'd been holding in his hand. Nor is he aware of the way water splatters onto his feet or the way some of his coworkers start hurrying over or the way other patrons start to stare and titter. None of that matters at all.

His world narrows down to a very small margin: those four words, and the man who has spoken them.

He's very tall, this man, and dressed in what Will would normally call "overdressing" except that it is actually snowing and this man will probably be more comfortable going home in his nice thick coat with gloves then Will'll be when he goes home. His hair is slicked back, he has sharp cheekbones and broad shoulders, and his eyes, well. His eyes are so deep and dark and mesmerizing, but they don't overwhelm Will like most people's eyes do. There's a surface curiosity, of course, but he can't get anything else from this guy.

The man looks from his frozen hand and then back to his face. "I imagine that you have said 'How can I help you today' so many times that it no longer registers when it passes your lips," he says quietly, and damn it if Will doesn't start flushing at the sound of that voice.

"Um . . ."

Thank God for Beverly Katz, thank god thank god thank god, Will thinks, because at that point she slides up, yanks Will back, and hustles the both of them into the employees' only lounge before people really start getting interested.

Except he immediately regrets that praise, because then she *leaves him alone with the guy and locks the door*.

"I think there's been a mistake," Will blurts out.

The man looks up from where he's busy carefully removing his gloves from his hands. He has an air of old world elegance all around him, and it makes Will want to apologize for the stains on his pants and his untucked shirt and mismatched socks, except for the tiny voice in the back of his head that tells him he doesn't owe this man anything.

"Considering the strength of your response to the words I spoke," the man says carefully and slowly, as slowly as he removes his gloves, "I think not."

"How did you even – ?"

"Your nametag," the man answers, gesturing at his chest. "Unless 'Here Comes Santa Claus' is truly your legal name?"

Will's just maybe tipped this man off that they are soulmates, bound forever in life and death, and this man has the nerve to *tease* him? Will's either going to love this guy or hate his guts.

"No, it's, uh, Will. Will Graham."

"Well, Will, Will Graham," the man says with a slight smile, rolling back his sleeves. "I'll show you mine if you will agree to show me yours."

It's only when Will sees the dark lettering on the man's forearms that the words sink in, and Will blushes as he struggles to remove his employee vest and hike up his shirt, hoping that the man doesn't think that he's been marked as a soulmate to someone without a brain or any smarts at all.

Written in Will's untidy scribble on the man's arms, three words for each forearm, are: *How can I help you today*.

Judging by the way the man pauses, ever so slightly, when he sees *Here Comes Santa Claus*, it's definitely his incredibly neat and looping handwriting curving in a slight arc on Will's belly.

Normally, this is the part in movies when the angel choirs start singing and soft lighting highlights people's faces.

In reality, this is the part where Will's soulmate asks, "May I have your business card?"

And. Seriously.

Yes, sometimes people do fake soulmate marks just to get into better lives. And yeah, everything about Will's soulmate just screams *money money money*. And not like new, young money, this man carries himself like a guy who's had a chauffeur and a servant and most likely a butler to come with whatever massive estate he has tucked away somewhere. It's not saying he's spoiled or useless, since Will's getting a sense of competence and pride from him, but for Will's soulmate's first words to be an attempt to see if Will is trying to scheme him in hopes of turning a profit for a business or whatnot turns the flush in his cheeks from sexy embarrassment to murderous rage.

Will drops his shirt. Lets his damn nametag clatter to the floor.

His soulmate says, "I – Wait – "

"If you're so worried about me scheming you out of your precious estate," Will snarls, "then don't worry anymore. I hereby revoke my mark and my claim."

The man's eyes go wide and he stutters to a halt. It's not a complex statement, but generally it's used for people who divorce. To revoke your mark is to take back the words you said that your soulmate has on their skin, and to revoke your claim is to release them from all bindings to you. With those eight words, Will essentially divorces them before they've even really got to know each other.

But he doesn't regret it. He can't. He's been looked down and spat upon so many times that he doesn't really care anymore. So what if he loses his soulmate? He's got his dogs, and they're arguably better fits for his soul than any human.

So Will walks out of the door and doesn't look back, and he takes perverse pleasure in hearing it slam in his – the man's face.

---

Will gets thoroughly smashed and doesn't fancy his chances driving, so he pops into the nearest, cheapest hotel and falls face first into the bed and dreams of nothing.

He is awoken, rather rudely, by someone knocking at the door.

Since the reasonable assumption is that it's either Beverly to return his car keys or some kind of employee check-in since it would be in drunk Will's nature to schedule an absurdly early wake-up call just for giggles, he decides to answer it in his boxers and shirt because who cares?

So of course it's the man from last night.

"May I come in?"

Will slams the door shut.

---

Five hours later, when Will finally wakes up again and his stomach decides it's hungry, he opens the door reflecting dimly on the strange dream of a guy outside his door when he essentially trips over said guy on his doorstep.

"Seriously?" Will says, rubbing his toe.

The man has the grace to look a tad abashed. Of course, that might just be the fact that it's really cold and he's apparently just stood here for five hours with a warming bag full of weird containers. "I think . . . I made a misstep," the man says awkwardly. "I'm not – I am not good. With people."

Something about that statement strikes something in Will. Possibly the way the man is avoiding eye contact, possibly the way he's holding the food out like an offering, or possibly just the fact that he waited five hours in the cold for Will come back outside.

Or maybe it's just his rumbling stomach.

Either way, Will finally concedes to let the man inside.

"My name is Hannibal Lecter," the man announces, and Will barely stifles a sigh because of course it is. "Thank you for letting me in."

"I just don't wanna explain to the police why I have a frozen corpse in front of my door."

"Mm-hm," Lecter hums, and Will would accuse him of ignoring Will except that he's got a really good excuse because he's literally covered both the bedside table and the actual table with food and Will is still seeing more containers come out and get opened.

"Uh," Will says, "I don't eat that much."

Lecter falters. "I wasn't sure how long you'd allow me to be in your presence. I hoped, maybe, for at least a breakfast?"

The eggs do smell good.

Will's polished off one whole plate of eggs, sausage, and home fries when Lecter finally deigns to speak again.

“In the old days,” he says, “people used to believe that soulmates were reincarnated, to allow them many chances to find their way to each other again. And sometimes those meetings were not happy ones, so the words began to appear on places where they might have raised their hands or weapons against each other.”

Will pauses in the middle of another bite of bacon. “You think you, what, gutted me once in a prior life?”

“It is an interesting possibility, is it not?”

“So what I’d do to you, then? Slit your arms and laugh as you took ten years to bleed out?”

“I imagine after my treatment of you yesterday, you might still wish to do that.”

Will flushes all over again. Slamming the door had been childish and petty, and now, in the cold light of morning, Will feels ashamed at his actions. Hannibal was rude, but there was no reason to be so rude back. There’s no shame in incompatible soulmates. They happen.

“Yeah, I . . . I’m sorry I slammed the door in your face,” Will mumbles.

“No apology necessary. I was incredibly rude to you. And – ” Hannibal sighs. “As I said: I am not well versed in interacting with . . . normal people.”

“Don’t worry, I’m not either.”

“From the stories of your regular patrons, you are kind and friendly.”

“That’s my job. Not really me.”

“I hope to get to know you. The real you, not your . . . person suit. If . . . you’ll let me?”

Hannibal’s tone is so damn hopeful. Will doesn’t know how he manages it. He doesn’t even really move his face or his hands or twitch or anything; he just . . . his voice is just so different and strange and beautiful, and Will can read him so well even though he doesn’t overwhelm Will. It’s new and nice and he kind of wants more.

“Maybe,” Will settles on, because he reserves the right to slam another door in this guy’s face.

Hannibal smiles, a true smile, one that wrinkles his eyes and relaxes his shoulders. It’s so strange on his aristocratic face, but Will feels a surge of pride for having put it on his stupidly attractive face and he doesn’t quite know why.

“Well, Will,” he says, “all I need is a maybe.”

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Day 23's prompt was "Candy Cane" and I decided to do a little Kingsman AU. Just because.

A/N: Also off-top author's note, but THANK YOU so much to everyone who reached out to me or left a comment or sent virtual hugs or anything. You truly revived my desire to writing just as it was starting to slip away, and even though I may not personally respond to every person, know that you made a difference. You added one more balloon to my pile of good things that helped lifted me back into the spirit of writing. :D

# Day 23: Candy Cane

Chapter Summary

> Will's only going through one of the most important tests of his entire life, so of course Hannibal gives him only a candy cane. Of course he does, the bastard.

Chapter Notes

> Warnings: um . . . . . nothing, really
>
> Because I ADORED Kingsman: The Secret Service and am slightly bummed that Kingsman 2 got pushed back. Also to flex my muscles in preparation for my Kingsman Big Bang.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will already personally thought that Kingsman were a bit touched in the head, but this? This is taking it like ten thousand steps too far.

There are only five recruits left – one drowned, one broke both his legs, one stormed out, and another, well, that person vanished with Merlin one night and never came back and no one's really worked up the nerve to ask what the bloody hell happened – so the tests are getting wackier and harder and Will gets that. They're a modern spy agency, they can only accept the best of the best.

But seriously?

To abandon them in a cold fricking snow-filled room in just their pajamas only three survival packs?

Will gets himself untied from his chair and gives the nearest security camera he can spot the middle finger. Mostly because he can, and mostly because he knows it'll make Hannibal smile because Hannibal is always watching.

He finds the door that leads out of the enclosure pretty easily. It's a huge fricking black door with the word "exit" emblazoned in huge blinking red letters.

It has also no door handle or pinpad. Just a clock counting slowly down for about the next ten hours.

Will groans and trundles off to find a survival pack.

---

“So, who’s betting on who?”

“Eggsy. We do not bet on candidates.”

“Aw, stop such being such a stickler, Haz. I know for a fact you bet on me.”

“Eggsy, kindly refrain from addressing Arthur as ‘Haz’.”

“Whoa, now I got two sticklers?”

“This is Agent Tristan, Eggsy. He’s been away on assignment in America.”

“Sweet! So which of these are your candidate, guv?”

“EGGSY.”

“Fine, fine, spoil the fun.”

---

Will has to climb over some fallen trees and then scramble painfully up a tree to retrieve a survival pack. Thankfully, the clothes are big enough so swallow him twice over so he just snuggles down and huddles in the tree to wait out the timer.

Some other recruits aren’t as lucky. More than once he hears the standard chime of a recruit’s “F YOU I’M OUT” button go off, which they were all given at the start of training but were warned that setting off means almost immediate disqualification from Kingsman barring “unusual circumstances”. Will thought it was a joke at first, given how Eggsy had said it with a wink and a twirl of the hips, but given that Hannibal seconded it, he’s about 50% sure it actually works.

After all, it’s not like Hannibal is straightforward either.

The man had literally popped up in Will’s house like a demonic Santa, and Will had found him and backpedaled into a door in fright over the tall man in a sharp suit with a crackling fire casting spooky shadows while Will’s pack sat with pricked ears and lolling tongues around him. Hannibal had then preceded to take over his kitchen, make chiding and disapproving noises over his limited supplies, cook him dinner, get him drunk, and then give him an entire long spiel which basically boiled down to “Come join Kingsman and I’ll be your sponsor.”

Will had thought he was over his “I have run out of craps to give” phase, but seeing that he shrugged and signed right then and there, maybe not.

And that all led to right now, where Will is currently shivering his butt off in a tree.

He blames Hannibal.

And yeah, technically, Hannibal has his own special code name based on some Arthurian knight or other, but Will knew him as Hannibal first. Well, actually, he knew Hannibal as the

creepy stalker guy first, but to be fair, all Hannibal had done was stalk him at various classes, the grocery store, the pet store, and his apartment. It wasn't until he broke into Will's apartment that Will was able to put a name to the face.

Honestly, what really clinched the deal was that Hannibal didn't waste time blabbing on about Will's "special" talents or the "opportunities" he could offer. Hannibal laid out his terms, offered a yes or no, and then dragged Will out then and there.

It's . . . nice. To not be underestimated or overestimated. Hannibal had had very clear ideas of what he wanted and Will appreciates that.

The fact that he is hot as hell in his Kingsman suit is not at all one of the deciding factors.

(On another note, Will can't wait until it's his turn to take a shift in the shop and practice measuring and stitching together suits. Possibly on Hannibal. Okay, definitely on Hannibal.)

But Hannibal is also dangerous. All the Kingsman agents are, but in different ways. Eggsy is the unexpected kind, the one that will run up the walls or vault over bar and kick you high when you expect a low blow. Bors is the explosive kind, the one who will obliterate everything in a ten mile radius for funsies. Percival is the polite kind, the one who will apologize even as he slices you apart. Hannibal, though, Hannibal is the feral kind, the one that pulls absolutely no punches despite his fancy suit. Will once jokingly punched him in the shoulder and Hannibal had smiled and proceeded to dislocate his shoulder.

Will's really good at predicting people, but Hannibal is a challenge, and Will loves it.

Take, for example, this challenge. Will knows for a fact that most sponsors were allowed to give their recruits at least one item. He also is pretty bitter about the fact that Hannibal gave him a candy cane.

It's a homemade one, to be sure, and it'll probably taste fantastic because Hannibal is an amazing cook. But still.

But then the timer clicks down to ten minutes, and Will sighs because now it's time to fight his way out of the door and vows silently to punch Hannibal again for giving him one lame candy cane as a weapon.

---

"Tristan."

"Yes, Arthur?"

"Really? A candy cane?"

"I was under the impression you encouraged us to challenge our candidates in unexpected ways."

"Hey, he seems to be holding up. I might actually win this bet."

"Mordred, you bet on my Will?"

“Whoa, possessive much?”

“Given that Arthur nearly demanded a codename of Guinevere for you, I imagine you do not have much ground to stand on.”

“Keep it down, you lot, they’re almost done.”

“Yes! I love winning bets.”

“EGGSY.”

---

Will and the remaining candidate are greeted, shivering and soaked, by a Merlin flanked by Arthur, Will’s sponsor, the other sponsor, and Eggsy, who is chewing on what looks like another handmade candy cane. Will immediately chucks the poor remnants of his at Hannibal.

“Really?” he complains.

Hannibal cocks an eyebrow and then smoothly unfolds from his seat, shrugging off a huge warm coat to drape around Will’s shoulders. “You acquitted yourself admirably,” Hannibal tells him.

“You couldn’t have given me something a little more useful?”

“No.”

Merlin rolls his eyes. “Congratulations, you’ve reached the next stage in your training. You two get a half a day break from Eggsy beating you up, so use the time wisely with your sponsors. If you’re late I’ll assume you’ve either died or bowed out. Good-bye.”

Hannibal flicks some snow off of Will’s shoulders, inclines his head to Arthur and Eggsy, and then leads Will out. The halls of Kingsman are silent as they pass, because they suffered a huge loss in the wake of Valentine’s SIM card mess and also because it’s the holidays and most agents are either busy cleaning up missions, finishing last minute mission reports, or away from the mansion altogether. But it’s okay. Will gets twelve hours with Hannibal, and he means to make the most of it.

“So how was your latest mission?”

Hannibal resolutely does not look at him. “You know you do not have the proper clearance for that yet.”

Will squints. Hannibal is good, but blood is still pretty hard to get all off when you’re in a time crunch. “I spy . . . at least four dead people,” he guesses.

“Will.”

“You said that my empathy was a good thing.”

“And so it is.” Hannibal opens the door to his private quarters and ushers them both inside. There’s already a warm fire and a separate room for Will, so he feels no shame is shimmying out of his cold clothes right then and there to slide into the warm, soft change of clothes Hannibal has so nicely laid out. “However, I imagine that you are also aware of the best times in which to use said empathy.”

“Like when you wanna kiss me?”

It’s very slight, the stutter. Hannibal’s poetry in motion, no energy wasted, every step and movement calculated to deliver precisely what he wishes – intimidation, effectiveness, death, and so on. And yet, and yet, just there, just the slightest hesitation, the slightest surprise, just the slightest deviation from Hannibal-autopilot.

So Will says, “Really?” Even someone half-asleep would have seen the way Hannibal looks at him.

“I do not wish to compromise your chances with Kingsman.”

Ah, the noble self-sacrificing excuse. Will actually had not expected that one from the man who’d once, when deprived of all other weapons at hand, jumped an opponent and tore out his throat with his teeth. But then again, Hannibal does consider himself a gentleman first and a killer second . . .

“I know Eggsy and Harry are together.”

Hannibal shoots him a flat look. “You are not helping your case by casting aspersions on the head of Kingsman and the newest agent.”

“Like Arthur cares. I definitely saw him and Eggsy snogging.”

“Will.”

“One kiss,” Will bargains, because it was Hannibal’s bargains that got Will into this entire mess and it’s only fitting that another bargain will get them into a new mess. “You’ve been staring at me long enough, Hannibal. You really gonna to leave me hanging?”

And, well, one kiss leads to another leads to another leads to a lot more. And when Will eventually passes the final trial – “Really, you were going to *run me over with a train* just to see if I’d spill???” – Will wakes up the morning after, warm and toasty and a bit sore, to find a pristine trail of candy canes down to the kitchen and a gleaming square box, because Hannibal is dramatic on top of being a gentleman, but Will only leaves him suspense for a few minutes before he says yes because he figures they’ve done enough mutual teasing to last an entire lifetime.

When Eggsy finds out, he whoops loud enough that even Harry just sighs and gives Hannibal a solemn congratulatory handshake.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Day 24's prompt was "Decorating/Decorations" and it will be a ABO AU. Thanks to my fandom idol & parent Victorine for helping me work out the plot, and the clue is: "consummation by proxy".

Day 25's prompt was "Holiday Party" and . . . . . I honestly have no idea what to do. If you have anything you'd like to see, toss it my way cuz I got nothing. I promise to give you (some) credit :D

See you tomorrow!

# Day 24: Decorating/Decorations

Chapter Summary

Will is the omega selected to stand in as proxy for the new queen. Hannibal is the alpha chosen to represent the new king. And it isn't just any wedding they stand as proxies in; they stand as proxies during the wedding and the consummation.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Alpha/beta/omega verse, dubious consent on Will's part for a rather long section, definitely gender inequality and discrimination, and in general lots of crappy, dubcon-y, unhealthy things that come from a more dystopian ABO verse

This is all thanks to the gorgeous victorine, who cheered me on when I told her the idea. You rock and are the best cheerleader ever! (Seriously though, this idea was literally me going "sooo marriage by proxy. What if they also like . . . consummated marriage by proxy?" Cuz I am really weird late at night.)

It was also inspired by this gifset floating around tumblr of Char and Johann in an ABO verse where Char slept around cuz he's the prince and Johann got all worried but then Char's like "The pup IS yours, Johann" and it's fluffy and cool. But I lost the link, soooo, sorry!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will's been put through a lot of really humiliating, degrading, dehumanizing things in life thanks to the laws that put Alphas first and Omegas last, but he thinks he current situation really takes the cake.

In this case, King Mason Verger is about to get married, and in the old Verger tradition he's chosen his sister, the lovely Margot Verger, who is actually more like his distantly-related half-sister, but that's not the point. Generally there's an Alpha Queen and an Alpha King, but no child comes from that kind of union, so when royals marry, they do so by proxy. The Alpha King offers a trusted alpha, to demonstrate his commitment and his good judgment of allies, and the Alpha Queen offers a trusted omega, to demonstrate her commitment and the good prospects that will come of their union. The alpha and omega proxies go through the wedding ceremony, and then the omega bears the Alpha King a child – preferably by the King, but not necessarily – and the tradition continues.

Will thinks it's ridiculous, but considering that originally the councilors had wanted to send Alana, he'd volunteered to spare her and so that's why he's not making a lot more sarcastic comments as he's prepped.

They spend a lot of time decorating him, because no one wants to be accused of destroying a union decades in the works by presenting an omega not up to par with whatever alpha Mason Verger chooses to send. They wash every single inch of him, drape him in the most luxurious jewelry, rub the most decadent spices and lotions everywhere, and on top of start the laborious process of inking the most delicate and ancient symbols of fertility, good luck, and all that fun stuff until Will's covered in so many things he's almost afraid to sneeze, much less walk into the marriage hall and be mounted in front of every dignitary in the world.

Not that Will gets a choice, of course. Right now, he is just a vessel, a symbol. He has no voice and no freedom, and there are plenty of armed and watchful guards to make sure he doesn't try to run.

Eventually, when he's deemed passable, they blindfold him – because God forbid he get a chance to see the alpha whose child he might bear – and tell him not to move.

And then the fun part starts.

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The marriage ceremony is old as time and twice as ridiculous. First, teachers from their youth testify that Margot and Mason are sound of mind and educated enough to bear the burden of being Alpha King and Alpha Queen. Then representatives testify that their union would be good for the people and the land. And then, finally, it's time for the consummation by proxy, wherein Will gets to be led around blind, naked, and barefoot so that the representatives from both sides can ensure no one is offended before he's brought before the ceremonial bed and tied face down to await whatever alpha Mason sends as his offering.

It's strangely disconcerting, having the blindfold around his eyes. Will had been advised to use his ears, but with so many people coughing and shifting and whispering, really he has no idea what's happening or what's coming until he feels fingers against his thigh.

Will jumps.

The alpha doesn't speak – he can't, just as Will can't, although only Will gets the lovely gag that's making him drool into the bedsheets – but he smells . . . reassuring. He smells like pine trees and old books and baked spices, like libraries and kitchens, and his fingers are gentle as he traces the Verger crest they drew so carefully onto Will's back.

All in all, better than Will had been hoping for, considering the stories he's heard about Mason Verger and his proclivities.

Then silence falls, and Will feels the bed dip as the alpha leans down to scent Will.

"Are you satisfied, Alpha?"

This alpha speaks for Mason Verger in this moment. Technically, by proxy, he is Mason, just as Will is Margot. If this alpha decides Will is an offensive or inadequate offering, many bad things will follow.

The alpha takes a deep breath. Holds it.

But then he must nod or something, because there's a sigh of relief around the room, and Will feels the bed dip even more as the alpha clambers onto it, covering Will from nape to buttocks with his own body.

Will closes his eyes and thinks of Alana, grateful, beautiful, poor Alana, and tries not to tense.

Thankfully, this alpha is both gentle and sure. He knows exactly what is required for the ceremony and he doesn't hesitate to position Will as he needs, but he's not rough either. And Will's seen some past ceremonies, where the alphas take and take and take, but this alpha doesn't. He understands Will can't run and that the chains bite, and he never jars or yanks or scratches. Just careful thrusts, even as his breath grows harsh, and he even squirms a hand underneath Will, which makes him jump again.

And then the alpha goes rigid around him, teeth snapping just shy of Will's neck, arms corded with tension where they cage Will's body, and Will's pretty sure the alpha wasn't supposed to bring him off but this alpha seems like he really doesn't care. Most times the alphas just get up and leave, but this alpha stays, his body a shield against prying eyes and the cold, and it's only when the handmaidens arrive with robes and cloth that the alpha finally deigns to leave.

Will almost regrets it. He kind of liked that feeling, those arms around him and that chest against his back.

But it's tradition. So he doesn't speak, even as the alpha leaves.

---

Margot and Mason marry in a far more elaborate ceremony, with Alana on Margot's right and some trusted advisor in a suit on Mason's left, while Will gets to lounge in the private quarters and take a nice long bath. He's pampered, now, since he might be carrying the next heir even if he has no clue what the other father looks like.

Mason never comes, thankfully, but Margot does, and so does Alana.

"I'm sorry," is the first thing Alana says.

Will blinks. He's got a huge dinner in front of him, he's wearing the finest silks in the kingdom, and he can't leave his room but there are lots of books everywhere he turns. "I really think I'm okay, Alana."

Margot sighs. "I wish I could just . . . get rid of that stupid ritual."

"Tradition is power," Will reminds her, because it definitely is. Margot may be the Alpha Queen now, but she still needs every advantage she can get.

The other visitor Will gets, strangely enough, is the weird suited advisor to Mason. He's not as crazy as Will thought he would be. In fact, the alpha is downright the complete opposite, standing when Will enters the room, pulling out his chair, and even waiting until Will starts eating before he starts on his own plate. It's so bizarre it really throws Will off.

Of course, he does take a rather close sniff of Will, so.

"Did you just smell me?"

The advisor, who'd introduced himself as Doctor Hannibal Lecter, tilts his head back and steps away. "My apologies. I was curious to see if – "

"I was knocked up?"

Lecter's mouth twitches. Will's learned he doesn't really appreciate crude language, but sometimes reality is brutal. Eventually, Will needs to pop out a child for Mason or his proxy, and if he doesn't catch this time, there will be many more next times or, alternatively, questions as to his suitability and possibly a big fancy execution.

Still, Will's not blindfolded this time. "I'm not. You can smell I'm not."

Lecter inclines his head. "Through no fault of your own. I understand that the ceremony is stressful in and of itself, not to mention the preparations beforehand. It is not surprising if the omega feels too unsafe to bring a child into the world."

It's an interesting idea. And Will's heard it before.

Except he's heard it from omegas.

"You think that the omega must feel safe and secure to successfully get pregnant?" Will says slowly. "I was under the impression that the leading theory was that the alpha was either lacking, or the omega infertile."

Lecter crosses his legs. They've since moved to chairs by the fire, although Lecter has made no move to relinquish the five or so layers of his clothing. Will has no such compunctions; he's down to one silk robe and nothing else. Besides, it's not like it matters. Lecter's position in the court means he was almost definitely at the most embarrassing moment in Will's life, so it's not like he hasn't seen everything under Will's robe.

"I am a medical doctor. I believe that the bond between alpha and omega is paramount to healthy offspring."

"You won't find many supporters of that here."

"I am long since resigned myself to that," Lecter acknowledges. "Still. It behooves me to offer my services, to ensure the continued success of the Verger dynasty."

Will drops his wine glass, but he doesn't even notice. He had been getting more comfortable, trading barbs and arguments with someone who seemed to care more about his mind than the

child he could one day bear, but apparently even Will's empathy has shortcomings, because he didn't see this coming.

If it was a test of his loyalty, it's a terrible test. And if it was a genuine offering, well.

Those who cuckold kings never meet happy ends.

"Get out," Will says, abruptly furious.

Lecter pauses. Before, he had lounged like a tiger basking in the sun, but now he appears . . . not shy, but surprised. Different. Not offended, but chagrined in a way Will senses is new for him. Like he's made a misstep, and not quite sure where. "Will, I meant no – "

"Get. Out."

"Will – "

"I am the representative of the Alpha Queen, Margot Verger, and the bearer of the next King or Queen. Get out."

Lecter gets out.

That night, when Will is called to be bred, he's still so angry that it takes him a while to realize that Mason still hasn't made an appearance. He's still sending his voiceless, gentle proxy, although tonight the alpha takes him roughly and sets teeth to his shoulders, as though he knows Will needs a distraction. And it's not exactly new – sometimes alphas do just send their proxies and never bother to show up themselves – or unwelcome – Will hasn't met Mason alone yet and he doesn't wish to – but it is one nice thing in a series of crappy things that is Will's life, so this time when the alpha rolls off of him and makes to leave, Will fumbles for his arm and holds on tight, so that he drifts off to sleep with a warm chest to his back and a strong arm over his waist.

---

Lecter stays away for a while, thank the heavens, but eventually he does reappear because of course Mason's too lazy to check for himself if Will's with child.

Will doesn't even bother to look up from where he's practicing writing in court shorthand. "I'm still not pregnant. There. Your job is done. Good-bye."

Lecter hesitates. He hasn't event taken his coat off and Will knows he's being terribly rude, but, hey, Lecter was rude first. And it's not like Will's had a chance to burn off his angry energy. Lecter is free to roam the coat, like all alphas. Will is stuck in a tower with exactly four rooms: his bedroom, his bathroom, his sitting room, and his entertaining room. He knows every single crook and cranny of all of it now.

"I came to offer my apologies," Lecter says.

"Not accepted. Good-bye."

"William."

“You know the way out. Good-bye.”

For a moment, Lecter stops breathing, which gives Will satisfaction in having annoyed the alpha enough that he has to pause and hold his breath to maintain his composure. But then there’s a strange swishing of fabric, and at first Will’s hopeful that Lecter is finally leaving in a huff, but it’s shortly followed by crinkling, like a bag being removed from under a coat.

The source of sound turns out to be Will’s greatest weakness: a bowl of freshly made bananas foster.

“What – ”

Lecter’s eyes crease in a smile, even as he dutifully hands over a spoon as Will ignores him in favor of digging in.

“I spoke to Alana. She advised me that apologies should come with appropriate gifts.”

Will points the spoon at him. “You mean bribes.”

“If it works.”

“ . . . Maybe for one more visit,” Will decides after a long, delicious swallow. It really does taste amazing, especially because Will’s been stuck on a “healthy” diet to ensure healthy heirs. “Before I toss you out for good.”

---

One visit becomes two which turns into three with ends up in four, and eventually Will gives in. Hannibal is as snobbish and snooty as his appearance and first impression made him out to be, but not the ways that offend Will the most. For example, he has a great insistence on providing Will with better food – he even leverages his reputation and influence with the cooks – but he doesn’t really care that Will sometimes forgoes proper court attire to loll about in robes or silks. He is always proper about bowing before Will and knocking before entry, but he never attempts to scold Will like a child. And he always brings new foods to try and new stories, because most importantly of all he never assumes that just because Will doesn’t have any influence in court means he has no input or ideas about it.

“You were given a thorough education,” Hannibal comments once, after receiving a rather long-winded rant on trade routes.

Will shrugs. “Everyone thought I was going to be an alpha.”

“Education is always important. Regardless of one’s gender.”

Will tips his head back and regards Hannibal. It’s evening and the fire casts strange lights on the alpha’s face, but he seems . . . softer, somehow, in the crackling flames. Like the warmth has melted some of his coldness and thawed his attitude.

Or maybe it’s just the wine talking. It had been an excellent vintage, because Hannibal always insists on the best.

“Why aren’t you mated?” Will asks.

Hannibal pauses just before taking a sip. Then, because he’s Hannibal, he very carefully sets it down, pats his mouth dry, and considers Will’s question. Will is mostly caught between being thrilled at getting an honest consideration and annoyed at the showmanship, but to be fair, Will’s also far more inebriated right now, so personally he thinks he gets a bit of a pass.

“I haven’t found the right person. Cliché as that may be.”

Person.

Not *omega*.

For some reason, Will finds that highly interesting. In all other respects, Hannibal is a traditional alpha through-and-through, tall and broad-shouldered and strong, scent unique and healthy, attractive and wealthy and in general a great catch. He brings Will new clothing (“You might find these clothes more in line with your preferences, I think”), new food (“Heavens, that is atrocious, put that away now. Eat this, I must have a word with the kitchen before your next meal”), and new beverages (“This tea has a good reputation for promoting good sleep and good health, both of which I think you will find you need”). He’s just *nice*.

“Well, Doctor Lecter,” Will drawls, “just how hard are you actually trying?”

Hannibal gives him a slow smile and an even slower sip of wine. “When it proves successful,” he says, “I will be the first to tell you.”

---

Six months in, Will is still not pregnant and therefore still getting bred weekly by an alpha that is not Mason. Mason seems to not give a single whit that his heir might be from neither Verger’s blood at all.

Not that Will’s complaining of course.

The proxy alpha is still the same as the one who performed the consummation. He is gentle and kind as always, although he still refuses to let Will take the blindfold off and he still never talks. Generally this does not bother Will at all, because sometimes it’s become more like a chore than anything exciting, but one week it actually does bother him.

Later, Will might admit it’s because Hannibal is away on a “state visit” and hasn’t been to see him in two weeks, but for now, he’s just irritated and snappy.

The alpha is confused. Usually he tries to bring Will pleasure, but today Will is having none of it, and eventually Will just rolls over, elbows the alpha in the face, and takes the blindfold off himself.

Which is when he comes face to face with the alpha that’s been trying to get him pregnant for half a year.

“Hannibal,” Will says.

Hannibal is flushed, naked, panting, shoulders heaving, eyes bright, mouth bloody.

He's gorgeous.

"Will."

And Will's mind looks into those dark, dangerous, gorgeous eyes and goes *click-click-click*. "You've been putting Mason off. You never wanted him near me at all. And you also never intended to tell me."

"My precious darling," Hannibal says, and his voice is so proud it sends chills up Will's spine. He's heard Hannibal annoyed, surprised, stoic, happy, gentle, sad, quiet, but never quite so proud. Of all things to make this alpha proud – and proud he is, Will can practically see the way his chest is puffed up in a fruitless display – Hannibal chooses *this*.

"How long?"

Hannibal shrugs. "To be truthful, I had never heard of you before the ceremony. All I was told was that Mason entrusted the duty of evaluating the chosen bearer to me, and I, of course, obliged him."

Obliged. Will snorts at the word. Like Hannibal would ever do anything he wouldn't want to.

"That's not what I meant and you know it."

"Since you ordered me out of your room," Hannibal answers, eyes dancing, "and looked quite ready to bash my head in should I not comply."

And, well, that figures. Of course Hannibal would want the omega who threatened murder, instead of any *normal* or *traditional* omega, soft and sweet and compliant. It's the final puzzle piece of this very strange man, the mild-mannered courtier who came to him the mask of a wolf and the ruthless lover who came to him donning the skin of a sheep. He is both and neither and Will finds that it settles somewhere deep in his belly, where his instincts lie dormant, a part that chants *yes this this is for us, for the taking, take it*.

"So what now?"

They barely manage to make it back to their separate quarters before the court rises.

---

After that, they spend a lot more time talking with their bodies than with their mouths, and they don't restrain it to the traditional breeding chamber either. They defile the bathroom, the bedroom, the sitting room, the entertainment room, Hannibal's bedroom, Hannibal's terrifying large closet, and, one daring day, the throne room itself, Hannibal snarling with fierce teeth and Will laughing so loudly he's really surprised no one came running.

And with all that, maybe it's less surprising that Will ends up finally catching.

Hannibal, when he finally scents it on Will's skin, for the first time loses his voice and his thoughts and really all of his mental power. He just stands there, mouth slightly parted, hands

frozen, eyes blank, until Will finally kicks his shin and restarts his brain, after which he immediately gets on the floor and becomes all sniffy-alpha again.

Will begrudgingly allows it.

---

And then Mason comes to visit for the first time.

And by "come visit" what Will really means is that he sends guards to drag Will out of bed and march him, shivering and disoriented, down the breeding chamber and throw him on the floor like a used dishrag.

Will bows, because he's not an idiot, but Mason's already talking.

"So I see you're carrying," the Alpha King says, pacing back and forth across the length of the camber. His footsteps echo strangely on the floor and perfectly match the strange cadence of his words. Most people would pause for dramatic effect in the middle, but Mason doesn't – he pauses a grand total of four times.

"Yes, Alpha King."

"How interesting." Mason yawns. "Well, I suppose you are pretty enough. You don't smell that bad either."

Post-climax, Hannibal tends to be a great deal blunter and freer with his speech. The last time Will had wondered, briefly, if they might be caught out since Will smells a great deal more like Lecter than Verger, Hannibal had actually snorted and claimed that Mason had the scenting ability of a nose-blind dead animal. It had made Will laugh, then.

Now he's not laughing at all.

"But let me tell you the most interesting part of all, Willy-boy," Mason says, tapping his foot on the floor.

There's a pause.

"Well? Aren't you going to ask???"

"What is the most interesting part, Alpha King?"

Mason smiles crookedly and bends down, propping up Will's chin with one quivering finger. Up close, his scent is as repugnant as Hannibal's is alluring, and Will barely contains a disgusted face. He knew Mason was regarded as insane, but to smell the unhealthiness as well as see it in his court is an entirely different.

"Willy-boy," Mason coos, "the most interesting part is that I never ever laid a single finger on you."

Will tries not to react.

He fails.

“Oh-ho, someone thought they were keeping a secret, did they?” Mason exclaims triumphantly. “You thought your little pow-wows with poor Doctor Lecter went unnoticed. Well, thankfully I do have some loyal staff remaining. And whaddya you know, guess who I caught half-dressed on his way back from your quarters last night? Oh don’t worry, he’s fine,” Mason adds quickly, “he’s enjoying the *lovely* hospitality of our best prison cells right now. And tomorrow the executioner will have a wonderful appointment with him. We have been due for a beheading.”

Will’s mind goes *click-click-click* because Mason is serious and crazy and stubborn. And he will cut Hannibal’s head off and probably burn Will at the stake. Not to mention what he’d do to Alana and Margot.

So Will says, “No. You won’t.”

“Says who?” Mason says, and somewhere between the first word and the second his voice turns into a roar, spittle flying everywhere and eyes bulging. “I’M THE ALPHA KING!”

“You won’t hurt me or my baby or Margot or Alana or Hannibal,” Will says steadily. His heart is pumping wildly in his chest and he’s sure it’s not healthy at all, but he can’t help it; he’s got a helpless child curled in his belly and an alpha who needs him, and there’s a reason in the old days that conquering alphas never ever harmed children who still had bearers standing. Alphas might be driven to fight for land or money or reputation, but omegas – omegas fight for something far greater than that. Omegas fight for life.

And Will isn’t just an omega.

“I’m William of House Graham,” Will announces, and he knows he’s hit his mark when Mason blinks. “Before House Graham became part of Bloom’s territory and before Bloom swore fealty to Verger, House Graham clawed itself out of the dirt and made a name all on their own. And we did it with omegas.”

In purity, of course, the Grahams are all but gone. Killed, fled, or absolved into greater houses and kingdoms. But every alpha and omega remembers, and each passes down a legacy greater than any name.

Which is why, when he rises from the floor, grasps Mason’s head, and twists it ruthlessly until he hears a crack, Will’s hands are absolutely steady and successful on the first attempt.

The Grahams were assassins first and nobles second, after all.

Will then sets the scene: a half-opened door leading to a winding servant staircase, scratches on his arms, Mason crumpled on the floor with a dagger in his back, Will curled in a tight ball on the opposite wall, heart still racing. He’s just about getting ready to let out a bloodcurling scream to get the guards in when the door bursts open all of its own, and Will is momentarily shocked when no guard appears.

Instead, it’s Hannibal.

And yes, Hannibal is flanked by Margot and Alana, which Will sort of expected, but Will did not expect Hannibal to turn up covered in blood splatter, lash marks on his shoulders and back, and torn, abused pants the only clothes he has.

“Will,” Hannibal snarls, and it’s barely a word at all, more of a feral recognition between alpha and omega, mangled by Hannibal’s teeth and accent and hoarse voice, but Will accepts his embrace all the same, ignoring the blood and the sharp smell of violence in Hannibal’s scent to accept the comfort of knowing that he is alive and mostly well and strong enough to get out of even Mason Verger’s darkest, deepest cells.

“I made a deal for him to save you,” Alana says from behind, sounding amused, “but apparently that wasn’t necessary.”

And, well, back to square one.

“So what now?”

---

With some nudging and maneuvering and good old fashioned intimidation, Margot easily assumes the throne in her own right, taking Alana as her consort and bearer. For the crime of killing the Alpha King, Hannibal is summarily stripped of his position at court, his holdings, and his assets.

Generally, a new Alpha on the throne would have the former bearer or their children put to death, to avoid squabbles over inheritance. Margot, in a stroke of genius, chooses to demonstrate her wisdom and mercy by sparing Will and his unborn child, something that wins her approval amongst the common folk and lower nobles.

In an even better stroke of genius, she spares Hannibal from the slow execution of a king-killer in exchange for charging him with Will’s protection and granting him exile instead, which wins her the approval of a court saturated with Hannibal’s admirers and Mason’s opponents.

Will and Hannibal don’t even need to think about it before they take Margot’s deal.

They leave by sunset.

And yet, for some reason, there is no flicker of triumph or pride in Hannibal’s gaze. He almost seems . . . moody, actually, and Will at first doesn’t notice it mostly because he’s alternating between busily stuffing his mouth and dozing whenever the urge strikes. But then he realizes that it’s been two hours and Hannibal has not said a single word or done anything except move his leg when Will playfully reached out to nudge him.

“Hannibal. We’re alive. We’re safe. What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.”

Will pokes him with a foot. “I know you’re lying. You can’t lie to me.”

It's that Hannibal is a bad liar, per se. Hannibal's actually excellent at lying. Case in point, the six months he spent alternately winning Will over with his courtier face at the same time that he was busy making love to Will every week without ever giving it away to Will. But even Hannibal has tells, and Will's rather well attuned to them now.

"We are leaving everything you have ever known behind," Hannibal says finally, and each word is dragged from him so reluctantly it reminds Will of that time he'd gone fishing and had had to pull the fish in by hand, yank by yank, because it was so strong and so hard to land. "The court, your fine clothing, your lifestyle, your friends. I am bringing you and your child into an uncertain future, where I cannot promise you anything close to what you have come to expect. I am . . . not certain it is what you truly want."

It's easy, then, to take Hannibal's limp hand and press it to the small swell of their child. Because this is important, and sometimes actions are as important as words.

"Our child," Will murmurs. "This is our child, and we will make a life for them."

Hannibal hesitates.

"The pup is yours, you know. You were my first."

"No one," Hannibal vows, "no one will ever touch you again against your will. This I swear to you."

"So," Will says casually, "you still worried and worked up and moody, alpha-mine?"

In answer, Hannibal kisses him, on each of his hands and the swell of their child and the neck where Will's bonding glands remain unbroken and then finally on his lips, because Hannibal is as sentimental as he is bloodthirsty and Will wouldn't love him any less for it.

"Of course not, omega-mine," Hannibal replies. "I have you. And a castle for you and our child to make a new home in."

"Wait, what?"

---

In the end, it turns out that House Lecter has a secret backstory almost as interesting as House Graham. Although Hannibal's heritage does come with a castle, which is indeed pretty cool, Will does concede that. But he still thinks that assassins still trumps secret castle.

Hannibal disagrees, but after the fifth time Will kicks him out of bed to make food in the middle of night, he stops arguing.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Day 25's prompt was "holiday party" and eventually somewhere from the depths of my brain I got an idea. HUNGER GAMES TIME, PEOPLES!!!

# Day 25: Holiday Party

Chapter Summary

This is indeed a grand holiday party, but of course, only the best for the victors of the Hunger Games.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: dystopian AU, sooo all the weird f-ed up things that go with that, plus dubcon and implied prostitution against one's will

So this thing was originally could have been an alternate meeting AU, an aliens-attack-the-earth superhero AU, or a Panda!Hannibal Red panda!Will AU. Instead it became a Hunger Games AU. Even though I've only seen and read the first book. Just because.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There are fireworks and endless tables groaning under the weight of food from every district and fountains that dispense every liquid known to man and stages filled with dancers and acrobats and colorful displays and a great many number of servers standing by and eager to please guests with anything they might think to desire or request. It’s a holiday party like no other.

But of course, only the best for President Snow and the victors of the Hunger Games.

Well.

Most of the victors.

Hannibal doesn’t generally come to the Capitol. He finds most of its citizens lacking in either common sense or fashion sense, and sometimes both, and many are still far too fond of retelling the story of his grand triumph, where he went head to head with a far younger Career tribute and still came out on top, disemboweling him and leaving him to dangle over the Cornucopia until his death. It’s a fairly thrilling story, but Hannibal has heard it so many times that most times it’s all he can do not to correct them. Or end them. Either works.

But this is the Capitol, with President Snow and over half a hundred victors under one roof. Tonight is neither the time nor place to stir up a fight over such trivial matters.

Tonight is the night they toast the newest arrival to their ranks, a petite little thing called Will Graham of District 4. Hannibal's not sure how he won – the Games play nonstop on every single device capable of broadcasting, but Hannibal tends to smile and retreat into his mind palace – but from the way Will is spoken about, it must have been bloody and superb. It certainly made the Capitol very pleased, which is why Will is being auctioned to the victors first and not simply citizens of the Capitol.

Hannibal just drinks and nods along. He's actually debating drifting off into his mind palace again for the rest of the night when Margot slides coolly into his space.

"Margot."

"Hannibal."

They eat take a careful sip of their drink. They each are well aware of the other's stance on many topics, which Hannibal supposes is a natural result of having been two victors of close age and close hunger games. They've spent a lot of time with each other. Margot thinks that Hannibal's indifference to the rebellion is a sign of broken empathy, for example. Hannibal, on the other hand, thinks Margot risks too little where it matters most and risks too much on causes driven by impulse over logic.

"My friend has a favor to request."

"Which friend? I haven't met many of yours."

The sting lands, but barely. Margot is a district 1 victor, groomed her entire life as a second fiddle to her career tribute hopeful brother, Mason, and in the end she had volunteered to escape a life of torturous comparison to her brother at the hands of her parents. Margot had stunned everyone, including herself, when she had instead drowned her brother with her bare hands to become a victor in her own right. She's suffered far worse with unflinching eyes than Hannibal's careful barbs.

"The one who walks amongst bears."

Ah. Jack, one of the leaders of the little rebellion all the victors pretend to know nothing about. He's the most high profile, since he used to be a high ranking Peacekeeper nicknamed "The Bear" before his defection and also because only a few years ago he successfully diverted a train carrying two tributes to the Capitol for the games and vanished them into the ether, drawing the ire and humiliation of the Capitol.

It's because of him that now every tribute is injected with a tracker the second they are shuffled off stage.

"Surely your friend has enough other friends to get things done without my help," Hannibal replies, since Margot is well aware of his indifference to the rebellion. They simply don't have the numbers or brains to leverage a victory, and honestly, Hannibal does not fancy being called into service as a hostage or cannon fodder during a second war.

Margot hums. "For most things, yes. Not for this."

“Well. I suppose it would only be polite to listen. For a friend.”

“The Boy on Fire,” Margot says. “We would . . . appreciate it if you took him off the market. At least for tonight. Until people are safe.”

“No one is safe from the Capitol.”

Perhaps Margot knows this just as well as Hannibal, but it bears repeating. Many victors before and after him have attempted to avoid being showcased at the many auctions amongst capitol citizens for the victors who win and are desirable. Hannibal once tried as well. All it bought him was the fate of being caged whilst he watched his family die a slow death in the snow and a tiny delay before they put him back on the market.

Still, it is a first for Hannibal to hear of the rebellion attempting to steal away a family first instead of after a victor is being put under pressure.

“They will be safe.”

On one hand, it would put Margot in his debt, and Hannibal generally makes a point of collecting favors even if he doesn’t think he’ll ever need it from whomsoever he makes the deal with. On the other hand, he has no desire of arousing suspicion from the Capitol, because although he can deal with pain – which is the only thing left for the Capitol to inflict upon him – it doesn’t mean he outright desires it.

In the end, to Margot’s clear exasperation, he flips a coin.

“Very well,” Hannibal tells her, “I’ll save the Boy on Fire. For tonight, at least.”

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The rules of the auction are fairly simple. Everyone sits in their designated seat, as they are meticulously arranged by year, and covers a simple sensor with their hand. To bid on someone, you simply have to uncover the sensor. It’s meant to be more of an unconscious display of luxury, for a victor to bid on someone by gasping or being startled and twitching their hand, as opposed to a meaningful, thought out decision by pressing a button or raising a sign.

They are victors, after all. Everything in their life after becoming a victor is supposed to be both luxurious and provided by the Capitol.

Victors can be in the running for the auction for quite a while, thanks to the marvelous abilities of the Capitol. The best can be there for twenty to twenty five years. And the best is always saved for last, so Hannibal is not surprised that he is forced to wait for a very long time before, finally, Will Graham, the Boy on Fire, is led onstage.

He’s dressed very simply, in swirling blues and whites to mimic the waters that his district specializes in. When they command him to lift his trembling arms and twirl, the shimmering fabrics make him a pretty picture indeed. Not that he would ugly, of course; the Capitol’s surgeons and artists go to great lengths to make all the tributes appealing, and the victors even more so.

Hannibal clears his throat as he uncovers his button, and the room falls silent.

There are some victors who never bid and some who always do. They all have their bad habits, after the games. Hannibal has staunchly remained in the former category.

Until now.

One by one, other victors incline their heads or purse their lips, but in the end, Hannibal's in the only bid left standing. The announcer smiles grandly and slips a sign bearing Hannibal's district number and game number around Will's neck, and it is done. For this year, the auction has come to a close, but there will always be next year, and the year after that. And eventually there will be a Quarter Quell, which means new rules for everyone. Every victor will be up for the bidding, both in the victor's auction and in President Snow's private one, and Hannibal's never been through that but he's quite sure it will be very interesting.

Assuming of course, Hannibal reflects after seeing the rage in Will's eyes, he survives this night.

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Will is delivered promptly to the private quarters of the victor who won him one hour after the end of the auction. They inject trackers, just in case, and they also treat him to a thorough cleaning and pampering session to ensure the one who bought him won't be offended and turn him down if he isn't up to par.

Personally, it makes Will itch for the knife he stole from the dinner table and secreted under his pillow.

Still, when he finally lays eyes on the mysterious victor who chose him of all people, Will has to admit he's a little shocked that it's the famous Hannibal Lecter, the victor most people laud for his disembowelment of his opponents but privately whisper about the suspected cannibalism during his hunger games. Given the sheer power Hannibal radiates, even in barefoot in a fuzzy red sweater and soft blue sweatpants, Will can't deny that he can see this man resorting to cooking fallen opponents to stay alive in whatever hellish games he was put through.

"So you're the Boy on Fire I've heard so much about," Hannibal says, sipping at his wine once the guards have deposited Will on the floor and left.

Will bristles.

"Ah. So you dislike the title. How interesting. Would you like to elaborate as to why?"

Will shakes his head.

"You can speak freely here. I'm sure it's nothing the Capitol doesn't know already."

Will pointedly eyes the keys the guards left next to Hannibal and says nothing else. He may be here to save his family, but he refuses to be kept as a prisoner just for show when there is no audience to pander towards.

Hannibal puts the keys in his pocket. “I’d like an answer.”

And, well, if that’s the game he wants to play. “They call me Boy on Fire because they think it flatters me to have been nearly been burnt alive when I tried to run from Francis.” Francis had been the male tribute from District 5 and he’d tried to set Will on fire. Will had run and run and run, until he couldn’t run any longer and had had to fight. He’d won. “We all know that everyone called me that long before I fought anyone in the arena.”

“Ah, yes, the encephalitis.”

Will blinks. It wasn’t exactly common knowledge.

Hannibal shrugs and takes another sip of wine. For a supposedly cannibalistic and ruthless victor, he seems more like a resigned lion, dozing in front of the warm fire with nothing better to do than play with little mice instead of eat them. “We all heard the rumors. The first time a tribute had to be removed from an arena for medical treatment for something that was not caught during the first examinations. Such an embarrassment for the Capitol. I’m sure it bought you much favor.”

“As much favor as it brought you to refuse the victory tour, I imagine.”

The predator pricks up his ears. “Clever boy,” Hannibal says, and tosses him the keys. “So you do listen, even if you can’t play the game as well.”

“I need to keep my family alive.”

“We all try, in the beginning. Some truths fall harder and faster than others. But come. Dinner awaits.”

Will pauses from where he’s trying to unlock his own handcuffs. It’s not that he’s been fed, exactly, or that he’s not starving, but – seriously? Dinner? He was bought at an auction and delivered in literally nothing but very sheer silk shirt and pants. Will hadn’t even been given the dignity of underwear, and Hannibal wants to suggest dinner?

“It’s only polite,” Hannibal tells him.

---

Will gapes at the table. It’s covered in beautiful – but still creepy – art decorations and elegant plate presentations filled with delicious smelling food. And, yes, all victors are supposed to take up “hobbies” after the victory tour and Hannibal was famous for being the cannibal victor who took up cooking, but still.

This is a lot.

“Eat whatever you like,” Hannibal offers. “You’re still recovering from the games.”

Will takes great advantage of that promise.

Dinner conversation is sparse and light. They converse about the weather, the coverage of the games, their districts, the other districts. Hannibal offers trite advice about how to conduct

oneself as a winner. Will reminisces of his victory of Francis. The dull things of their lives.

The interesting part is when Hannibal leads him to the bathroom and starts stripping, turning on a rather hot and loud shower.

“Coming?”

Will swallows. He knows the true purpose of the auctions and he knows exactly what will happen once the victors relinquish their claims and they go the citizens of the capitol.

Still.

Still his hands shake and his legs tremble as he lets the silks slide from his body and he follows Hannibal into the shower, where the man is leaning against the wall with water splaying all down his body from the water spilling from the ceiling, and the glass is so thick it actually becomes hard to see Hannibal’s body when Will shuts the door. Which strangely enough, makes it just a little bit easier.

“You can speak freely here, Boy on Fire,” Hannibal says, and the affectionate tone of voice makes it sound so different from the cloying praise of his fans or the disgusted insults of his haters. “The shower is far too loud for the capitol to hear what we are saying.”

And, well, Hannibal started it.

“I don’t want to have sex with you,” Will blurts out.

Because he doesn’t. Hannibal isn’t unattractive – actually, for a victor scarred by games he’s still remarkably in shape and not addicted or nightmare ridden, so already he’s not that bad. And he’s tall and handsome and has a sharp wit and keen eyes. But still. Will is eighteen and hasn’t so much as kissed, never mind laid down and experimented.

“I didn’t expect you to,” Hannibal replies. “I’ve over twenty years your senior, and I imagine you thought your first time would involve less bidding and sheer clothing.”

“Don’t mock me.”

“I’m not.” Hannibal twists his neck gracefully until it cracks and then takes up the soap and begins to scrub at his hair. His eyes never leave Will’s though, and they are deadly serious. “I had no intentions of taking your virginity, Will. I only bid on you as a favor to the rebellion. It seems they wish to make you their mascot.”

“The rebellion? What?”

“I imagine you have heard of Jack Crawford. Even in passing.”

“Well, yes, but he’s. You know. Dead.”

“The Capitol wishes he was dead.” Hannibal shrugs. “He is quite alive and well. And causing a great deal of trouble, actually.”

“I don’t want to get involved in a rebellion. I just want to go home.”

“Dear Will,” Hannibal says wryly. “You’re already involved. We all are. We are pawns in the Capitol’s game, and Jack and his rebellion have set their eyes on war with the Capitol. You are the shiniest newest piece of propaganda to be set down, so of course they will use you.”

Will swallows. He really does just want to go home. To take off these ill-fitting clothes and wash off the make-up and go back to fishing trips with his dad and long walks with his dogs. Is that really too much to ask?

“You are a victor now,” Hannibal murmurs. “They will always be watching.”

“How have you done it?” Will asks. “Stayed out?”

“They do not have the strength to succeed. They claim to fight for equal rights and the end of Snow’s tyranny, but in all honesty, their own president is not much better than Snow. All Tobias Budge wants is power and power and more power, and if there is war, so much the better. He can claim Panem for himself when all is rubble, and get it with everyone begging him to do so on bended knee. Staying out was a logical choice.”

“If it was about equal rights,” Will says, “truly equal rights, would you fight?”

“I do not know.”

“You’re lying.”

Hannibal pauses. Just briefly, but it’s still a pause, when before everyone single motion has been carefully calculated, as thought out and evaluated and selected as every single word he’s ever spoken to Will. It’s telling in and of itself. “What gives you that impression, Boy on Fire?”

“I have an inconvenient empathetic ability,” Will admits, because he’s sure Hannibal will guess it sooner or later. It’s right in his damn file.

And interesting, there’s a spark in Hannibal’s eyes. Sometimes honey, Will reminds himself, works better than vinegar. Hannibal won’t be lured with promises of equality or riches or dignity or the “right thing”. But Will’s mind, considered unique even by the advanced medical standards of the Capitol – maybe that will help.

“I think,” Hannibal says, “you have an inconvenient compassion for the underdogs of life.”

“Don’t rule the rebellion out. Please.”

“I thought you only wished for home, and fishing with your parents and walks with your dogs. A normal life, after the trauma of the games.”

“I want peace. I don’t think the Capitol will ever grant it to me.”

Hannibal grunts. “The hunger games are not war, Will. Not even close to war.”

“Sometimes,” Will says, “you have to fight.”

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They don’t have sex, in the end. Hannibal lies awake, thinking, whilst Will drifts off to the sleep of the exhausted, so out of it he barely even cares about the fact that their clothes pointedly were removed during their extended shower and they were forced to sleep in the same bed devoid of clothes and with only two flimsy blankets.

It’s okay, though. Will is indeed quite a magnificent creature, but Hannibal thinks it’s more about Will’s mind than his body.

He bids for another night with Will, and then another, and then another.

Will is a prize beyond compare, and he won’t share him with another victor, even if Will’s allure grows all the more by those interested in why Hannibal, the victor who never bids, starts bidding without fail on Will, who comes to him with eager eyes and relaxed shoulders. They talk and eat and argue in the shower, and one day Hannibal looks at a sleeping Will, his beautiful, precious, darling Will, and realizes he’s already chosen a side, because Margot knew exactly what she was doing when she asked Hannibal to save Will, of all people.

And when the Quarter Quell comes, Will is reaped because of course he is, so when Margot comes to him with a plan, Hannibal sighs and volunteers to go as well. When the rebels come, Hannibal cuts the tracker from his beloved’s arm and lets the Capitol’s men swarm him, fighting hard to the last, so that Will can escape. They poison him and drown him and electrocute him and brand him and bleed him, and Hannibal screams but he never speaks, because he will never give up Will, no matter what. His mind palace becomes his refuge and his memories of Will his sustenance.

And when the rebels take the districts, one by one, and then the Capitol, it is Hannibal who goes to Will with eager eyes and shaky steps, so they can kiss amidst the bloody remnants of the cities they’d destroyed in their war against Snow.

It’s also Hannibal who poisons Tobias Budge before he can announce himself as president, but all in fairness, he and Will both agreed Alana was much better suited as president than Budge.

And then they go home, to Will’s little home on the edge of the sea, and they pass the days drinking and fishing and walking Will’s pack, because they are victors of the hunger games that no longer exist and legends all the more for it, but they don’t care. They just want to live in peace, so they do.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Day 26's prompt is "Snowman"! And I might make Winston an animated snowman-dog thing. Like in Frozen. Stay tuned.

Day 27's prompt is "Hot chocolate"! I may or may not add in zombies. And the apocalypse. Just because.

# Day 26: Snowman

Chapter Summary

Will's got a gift for ice magic, so of course he does the natural thing. And no, the natural thing is not to make a snowman. This is Will Graham, after all.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: um . . . . . I don't think for anything? beyond the implications of Will being forced to hide himself and his abilities and the isolation it creates, but honestly even Frozen goes more in depth with that than I do here

This ficlet was inspired by two things: A)this scene from Once Upon A Time when they did a Frozen arc; and B) when I started seeing Yuri On Ice fanart run all over my dash (thanks a lot, my various fandom parents who got sucked in one by one) and I also had trouble distinguishing between Yuri and Hannigram fanart.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Will is eight, his mother looks from him to Winston and back to him before she groans.

“What?”

“Couldn’t have made something a little more . . . normal?” she asks, wincing as Winston wags his tail playfully and sends little snowflakes shivering through the air. “A snow angel? A snowman? A snowball, even.”

Will looks at Winston. His father is allergic to pets, so Will built Winston, who is made of snow and therefore won’t cause allergies. The worst Winston will bring is little bit of snowflakes when he gets excited and barks up a storm or wags his tail too much, and that isn’t that bad at all.

“But it’s Winston,” Will says.

“It’s just . . . not normal, honey. Try and control it, please.”

That is the first day Will gets gloves from his parents, but it’s certainly not the last.

---

Will always gets gloves. For birthdays, for parties, for coronations, for events, for speeches. Anything and everything, as a reminder and a warning. He has so many that he can match

gloves to any of the thousands of outfits that can be worn by a crown prince, and yet still, sometimes the gloves are not enough.

He slips up.

One day when the sun is unrelenting, Will conjures up ice cubes, so that no one faints during the heat of the summer festival. His father sighs and makes him shovel out the stables as punishment.

He and Princess Alana sneak away for a kiss in an old sitting room. They both agree they're not meant for each other, but even as she leaves, Will accidentally freezes the fire in the grate. His mother smacks him up the head and makes him clean the room when the ice inevitably melts and water gets everywhere.

Slowly, bit by bit, he learns control, but it's control that's so exhausting most days Will collapses in bed and falls asleep the second his head touches the blankets. Controlling his power is like holding back a torrential flower with a wall built of sand, and forming each grain of sand and placing it in the wall takes immense effort and concentration. And even at his best, water still leaks through his damn, and sometimes Will looks down under the table and his gloves are rimmed with ice and snowflakes and he has to quickly sit on them and pray no one asks why his seat is simply damp.

And then comes the day that the Human Cello killer strikes.

Every royal patronizes some field or skill, because it's how they give back. Will's father loves to go down to the docks and crack jokes with the fishermen and haul in nets and cast lines with them, for example. Will chooses the admirable profession of police work, so when the call goes out about a weird serial killer, Will goes to work.

The trouble comes when Budge proves more formidable than mere swords and guards, and when he grabs Beverly Katz by the throat, Will just reacts.

The gloves go flying, but so does Budge, and everyone else just stares due to the actual wall of ice pikes that nail Budge – snarling, blood-covered, struggling killer that he is – to the wall, helpless and pinned by a bug under glass. When everyone starts staring at Will, instead, the ice grows and spreads, until everything is covered like a winter wonderland, and Will scrambles up and out of a window, trailing ice whenever he flees.

Will takes the mountains. It's easier there – no cares if he keeps to himself and grows a crazy beard, no one cares that he's always followed by a snow-covered white dog, and no one cares that he only sells ice to make a living.

And maybe Will should regret it, a little, abandoning his family and his court and his kingdom, but right now all he cares about is the fact that he doesn't have to worry if he actually lets loose a snowflake here or an icicle there. Winston likes to chew on the icicles, anyways, and Will isn't bothered the least by the cold, so the crushing pressure of the dam is lifted and all Will has to do is *live*.

And dodge bounty hunters sent after the “winter witch”, but Will thinks that a minor inconvenience.

Or he thinks that until he wakes up one day to find three men standing at his doorstep, one holding an enormous golden urn decorated with words carved in unsettling patterns, embellished with fine jewels and rich paints.

“So you’re Will of the mountains,” says one of the men.

“What do you want?” Will asks wearily. He’s run so far he hardly remembers what it’s like to talk to real people now. It makes his voice crack and ache in his throat, and he sounds less like a prince and more like a hermit.

“People talk, you know. Even up here. Especially about that dog of yours.”

“Winston belongs to me.”

The man dips his head. “So he does. One might also say he was . . . created by you, no?”

Before Will can even open his mouth again, a fourth man appears, struggling to contain a barking, yelping Winston, who is casting snowflakes in his wake. It’s clear they’ve tried to cage him, except caging snow and ice is futile, so now they’re just attempting to control him with their bodies except that Winston is causing frost to form on them and their teeth are chattering. But they are determined.

“Let Winston go, he’s just – ”

“Something you made? You’re the witch of the mountains, don’t dare deny it. But hey, don’t worry too much,” he adds, “if you’re not, then I’m sure this urn made to contain ice witches won’t hurt you at all.”

“No!” Will shouts.

But it’s too late.

The man takes off the top and tilts the urn, and white foam comes cascading out. More and more and more comes out, so much that it couldn’t possibly be contained in that urn, until it forms an enormous meandering puddle on Will’s floor – a puddle that heads unerringly straight for Will. And Will scrambles backwards and even casts ice at his feet, but there’s no point; it just keeps coming.

“Oh, so you are afraid,” muses the man. “Well, I guess even monsters can be afraid.”

Will covers his head with his arms and prays that the urn won’t hurt too much.

The pool comes closer and closer, and for just one moment, it swallows him, like a bubble of living ice that shocks the very breath from Will. It’s not pain, not really, but for the first time Will understands what *cold* means, something that stings and burns but lacks heat. It takes his breath away.

And the ice puddle sighs and retreats.

“What?” says the man.

The puddle sloshes off of Will and gathers itself on the side, until finally it grows still, like a frozen pond, and then the surface starts to stretch, like cloth drawn tight.

A hand breaks through. And then a shoulder. And then another hand.

Mouth agape, Will watches in silence as a full grown man forms from the frozen puddle, rising to a formidable height. He’s got a shock of white hair, long and ragged, and he’s tall and broad-shouldered and seemingly not bothered by the fact that he’s coming out, dripping wet, from an ancient magical urn.

Even his clothes are out of this world, so blindingly white it’s like they’ve been crafted out of ice, but they’re familiar in their formality. Court clothes, with long sweeping cloaks and medals on the side of his chest and knee high boots.

The man even has a crown, icicles and frost coming together to form a circlet of ice on his head.

The man opens his eyes, and the second he does, a wash of cold air whips around the room, dousing the fire and causing snow to dust every surface.

“How rude,” says the ice-man, taking an imperious step forward as the men tremble. “You at least should have checked if it was empty first. It would have been terribly crowded with both of us in there.”

“You – I – get back in there!”

The man makes an amused noise. “No, I’m afraid I can’t do that. Genie out of the bottle and all that.”

Will yelps despite himself when the man turns to him, because the man looks absolutely terrifying. Cheekbones so sharp they could be icicles, eyes so blue it’s like staring into a frozen pond, and Will has no idea how his clothes can be so clean when they’re so white, but it does not make him less terrifying.

“Hello, Will. My name is Hannibal. Are these men bothering you?”

“Um, I – ”

“I think I shall take that as a yes.”

Hannibal turns, straightens, and flings out a hand, and a literal wave of ice goes rippling along in his wake, moving so fast the men barely have time to flinch before they’re all swallowed by it and emerge as perfectly still ice statues, frozen. Winston, merely, emerges perfectly unharmed, and he lopes happily over to Will to slobber snowflakes over his face.

It’s the most dangerous thing Will’s ever seen, a man who can turn others into ice, but god help him if it also isn’t the most interesting.

“Come on, witch of the mountains,” Hannibal says, and holds out a hand. “Let me show you the world.”

Will takes his hand.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Day 27's prompt was "hot chocolate"! And zombies, but the zombies was my added bit.

# Day 27: Hot Chocolate

Chapter Summary

> “You were delayed by zombies because you decided it was absolutely necessary to help yourself to a bag of marshmallows?”

Chapter Notes

> Warnings: cannibalism, end-of-the-world, zombies, etc
>
> This ficlet is for hannibalnuxvomica, because I reblogged a list of weird prompts and then they reached out to me and we started giggling over the marshmallows prompt and then they wrote me a ficlet and I started writing one back but I suck so it's taken a really long time. SORRY!
>
> In other news, please go read Hot Chocolate by hannibalnuxvomica. It's really great, I promise.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Hannibal receives word that Will’s group has been delayed due to a run-in with a group of zombies, he definitely isn’t worried. Not at all. Will is strong and skilled, from his years foraging for supplies and his former experience as a cop. Not to mention his reputation as Hannibal’s protégé, as only the very far gone or very determined zombies don’t shy away from Hannibal and his own reputation.

After all, when the world burned down and the dead clawed their way up from the graves, no one really cared what – or who – you ate. You did what you had to do to survive. Hannibal’s not the only one in this survivors’ group to have tasted human flesh, even if he’s the only one who still eats it regularly.

Thankfully, high temperatures is still enough to allow safe consumption for most human meat, but the reputation he’s earned keeps thieves and ravagers wary of targeting the Haven’s survivors, and even zombies can be taught fear. Hannibal is very good at teaching people the meaning of fear.

Still, that doesn’t stop Hannibal from arriving precisely at the gates the moment the signal goes up that people are coming back.

Will, as ever, is his usual perceptive self. “Were you worried about me?” he teases, grinning from ear to ear as he’s carefully patted down to make sure there’s no breach of security.

“I have absolute faith in your ability to come home to me.”

Will cocks an eyebrow, but he doesn’t say anything, mostly because they both know that his words definitely mean “yes”.

“I missed you too,” Will says, once he’s been cleared. He’s filthy and there’s probably guts in his hair and definitely stains on his pants, but Hannibal embraces him all the same, because even though Will smells absolutely disgusting right now, it’s still not as bad as that awful cologne, the last bottle of which Hannibal accidentally smashed before they finally gave up on Wolf Trap and fled with Will’s surviving dogs.

“Come home,” Hannibal murmurs. “Dinner is waiting.”

---

Their dinner table is hardly as formal or as elaborate as it once was, but, again, once the dead started rising, even Hannibal had to compromise with some things. He’s already in Will’s debt, because otherwise he would still be rotting in a clear cell in the BSHCI whilst zombies beat down at the doors. Or worse, perhaps, he would have been forgotten altogether, left to die a slow death as the administrators fled.

But Will came for him. Will, bloody, terrifying, savage Will, Will came from him with three guns, a backpack, and Winston by his side, and so Hannibal was saved.

He’s never asked Will what happened to the woman he married and the child she had.

Perhaps it doesn’t matter. They’ve all changed.

Still, Hannibal takes care when he makes dinner. He doesn’t have a large garden, but he tends to it faithfully and manages to get at least some good produce out of it. This is what supplements their diet, alongside whatever Will and whatever group assigned for foraging manages to bring back.

They also bring back medical supplies, sometimes, which Hannibal carefully hoards and distributes when necessary. He’s the only person with any professional medical training, not to mention that no one wants to cross him, so there have never been any thefts and for the most part, as long as Hannibal doesn’t show up in town too often, the survivors leave them alone and allow them to remain within Haven’s walls.

It works out for Hannibal and Will.

Sometimes, though, Will brings back smaller things. Trinkets, really, or anything that tickles his fancy. He brought back a skull once, when they raided a university, just to get a laugh at Hannibal’s sigh because it was a skull from a Day of Dead celebration and therefore was painted an array of dazzling colors with glitter. Another time he brought back a puppy, although a few pointed glances from Hannibal was enough to convince Will to hand the dog over to some of the children in town, given that Will’s pack is about fifteen dogs strong now.

This time, it turns out that what Will brought back was a bag of marshmallows.

“William.”

Will, who is digging in their box of hoarded sweets for hot chocolate powder, at first does not reply.

“Will.”

“What?”

“You were delayed by zombies because you decided it was absolutely necessary to help yourself to a bag of marshmallows?”

Will makes a face, which is most negated by the fact that he’s still damp from his shower and his curls are sticking up in every direction. “You make it sound like I saw the zombies and then decided to go back for the marshmallows,” he complains.

And, well, it does sound like Will.

“Oh, shut up. I survived, didn’t I? Besides, I bet you’ve never had marshmallows with your hot chocolate. It’s going to blow your mind.”

“I highly doubt that any heavily processed sugary fluff is going to do anything except make me regret my decision to imbibe the concoction you are trying to produce,” Hannibal says, because the last time Will told him something was going to blow his mind it was when Will brought back a can of whipped cream, and considering that Haven has some actual cows and has a milk distribution system to make real whipped cream, Hannibal was most certainly not blown away from the manufactured kind.

Will shoves the cup of hot chocolate in his face. “Just drink it and be happy, you weirdo.”

It certainly does not blow Hannibal’s mind.

“I will never understand you,” Will declares, happily sipping away at his terrible, disgusting, sugar-laden chocolate concoction.

“On the contrary,” Hannibal says, pushing his own cup in Will’s direction so Will can take back his horrible marshmallows and Hannibal can drink the rest of his hot chocolate in peace, “there is no one who understands me better than you.”

“Flattery doesn’t become you.”

“Perhaps, but it most certainly becomes you. And the blush on your cheeks.”

If there’s one thing Hannibal does regret about their life, it’s that there isn’t an abundance of paper left in the world. Well, maybe there is, but it’s usually sacrificed to start fires or sealed away to be used to record important facts in Haven’s logs, and Hannibal only has a very small stash with which to amuse himself.

He wishes there was more. Will is beautiful right now, with the fire behind him and his hair drying into fluffy curls and the blush on his cheeks as he cradles his hot chocolate close and licks up his marshmallows.

Instead, Hannibal will have to be content with immortalizing the image in his ever-growing wing of Will, Will, and more Will.

Once, he would have scoffed at the idea of an unquenchable thirst, an unrelenting hunger. What could have possibly driven anyone to such lengths, when for most things the mind is the master of the stomach and the heart?

Now he knows. Will gives himself to Hannibal freely in every way every single day, but if anything, each taste makes Hannibal all the hungrier, all the more eager for his next bite, even if the taste of the last is still lingering at the back of his throat. He’s obsessed and he knows it, but in this the mind and the heart are equally enslaved, and Hannibal doesn’t quite know or care how to get out.

Maybe it is the end of the world. But Hannibal doesn’t care. He has Will.

And that’s all that matters.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Day 28's prompt is "Ice Skating"! And no, I am NOT doing a YOI AU. Sorry. Mostly because I haven't actually watched the series, but also because . . . no, just because I haven't watched Yuri on Ice yet.

Day 29's prompt is "Mittens/Gloves"! It will involve Hannibal and knitting. :D

# Day 28: Ice Skating

Chapter Summary

> In all fairness, Will had not woken up this morning with the express intention of breaking every single one of the cardinal laws about two-leggers.

Chapter Notes

> Warnings: um . . . . . I don't think anything, actually.
>
> This was inspired by this post of weird AU prompts, specifically "Ok, so you panicked and kissed the human so he wouldn't drown, but we can't keep him and he can't leave if he knows about us merpeople, so what are we going to do".
>
> My second source of inspiration was Reflets dans l'eau by DarkmoonSigel because it's a gorgeous merman AU and I love it and if I talk about it anymore I'll start fangirling waaaay too hard, so let's just end it: read it. Read all of DarkmoonSigel's work, it's amazing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In all fairness, Will had not woken up this morning with the express intention of breaking every single one of the cardinal laws about two-leggers.

Actually, Will rarely goes to the surface at all. He prefers solitude, even it comes with dark caves and packs of strays and silence. Merpeople in general are loners, staking out territory and never leaving that territory unless someone's lost a fight or died. Will's one unique trait in his loneliness is that he is lonely out of choice, not necessity.

Merpeople are proud, and it can be incredibly easy for any meeting to devolve into a fight to the death. They just aren't good at socializing.

Will, on the other hand, is *too* good. He always knows what the other merperson wants, even if he doesn't give it to them, and it always comes across as incredibly strange, to ready the waters and know exactly what's happening. To save himself, he lives far away, where run-ins with others of his kind happen only once or twice a full year, if even that.

Still, it becomes Will's habit to swim up the river to one particular pond during the cold season. Not for the respite from the mating season that makes interacting with others of his kind even more difficult, but because of one particular two-legger. It comes like clockwork,

one a year, and puts on strange shiny feet-clothes and just does endless circles on the ice that forms over head. Will's not sure why or how, but he finds himself mesmerized by the patterns the two-legger makes, always elegant and focused and never a single motion wasted.

Will's seen two-leggers try to swim. It's clumsy and intensive and usually ineffective. It's why most merpeople regard two-leggers with derision.

Yet Will's never felt that way. The two-leggers cover the entire world where land is, and watching this two-legger twirl, he thinks that maybe they have their own way of swimming. Only theirs is through air, not water.

Only this time, something is different.

The ice is thinner, this year, and the two-legger seems not to notice but Will does. He's a merperson, he can't help but notice, so this year he regretfully watches from further away than usual, because every merchild learns the hard way what happens when ice cracks and you're far too close to swim away fast enough.

He certainly does not expect the ice to crack so fast that the two-legger wobbles and then falls in.

---

"You did WHAT?!"

Even underwater, Jack's yells are so loud Will can feel the walls vibrate. He flicks his tail with annoyance, but the damage is already done; he's already heard the tell-tale *whump* of several of his hard-won books falling in the secret cavern far ahead. Thankfully it's high tide, so none of them will suffer water damage, but it's still annoying.

"The two-legger fell in. It could not breathe, and it looked like it was drowning," Will repeats.

Jack takes a deep breath. It's so deep Will can see the way his gills flutter, but he supposes it's not the first time he's upset Jack. "Okay, so. You panicked."

"Yes."

"You didn't want the two-legger to die."

"Yes."

"So you kissed it."

"*Yes*."

"Well now what?" Jack shouts. "It can't *stay* here, Will, it's not a pet!"

Which, well, to borrow a two-legger phrase, *duh*. This two-legger isn't a pet, Will's strays are pets. This two-legger is just . . . a violation. Of Cardinal Rule Number One. And Two. And

Three. Possibly Four and Five and Six as well. Maybe more after that, but Will's never been good at following the rules, much less worshipping them with all his heart and soul.

"I can't throw it back," Will argues. "It knows about us."

"It – "

"I *kissed* it, Jack. Kissed it. Of course it knows about us. Even two-leggers can open their eyes underwater."

And hadn't this two-legger's eyes been beautiful, wide and blotchy and a deep, warm maroon. Will had swum up to it and it hadn't even had a flicker of fear in its eyes, only confusion and interest. It had looked at Will like it was a shark and Will was trespassing on its territory, and if anything, that had given Will the courage to seize the two-legger and kiss it long enough for its struggles to stop so that Will could drag it away.

"You, you just – get rid of it!" Jack snaps, right before he swims away.

Will rolls his eyes. Of course he'll get rid of it eventually. Just, you know, after he's learned a bit more about two-leggers. It's so rare that he finds *live* ones to experiment with.

---

The two-legger, who introduces himself as Hannibal, turns out to be relatively unfazed no matter what Will does. Still alive even though his last memory is drowning? Fine. Breathing underwater with no problem? Shrug. The existence of an entirely new race of sentiment merpeople? A blink.

"Are all two – I mean, humans, are they all like you?" Will asks curiously, watching as Hannibal pokes at his seaweed garden and makes faces.

"No."

"You seem . . . rather confident in that answer."

"I have met a great many two-leggers, as you call them," Hannibal says, moving onto to Will's measly stack of plates and cups, which are all mostly broken since Will salvaged them from sunken ships. "And I used to treat many of them. I believe I can safely say that there are none like me."

"Treat?"

"I was a doctor. Do you have doctors here?"

Will scratches at his arm. He's come across the term several times in his books, but he's never quite understood the point. "They're like . . . what? Healers?"

Hannibal's teeth flashes as he bares them. Will's learned it's his way of showing amusement, even though for a merperson it would be an immediate challenge. But perhaps it is a challenge for humans too. Will doesn't know them or Hannibal well enough to make any

guesses on the matter. But Hannibal doesn't seem offended, so perhaps he truly is just amused. "In a way."

"Maybe in some of the big cities," Will guesses, although he doubts it. Merpeople live or die on their own merit; he's never met a single one that would prefer admitting weakness for healing over dying with a strong memory.

"You do not sound all that confident."

"I'm a loner. I'm not exactly the best person to ask."

"On the contrary," Hannibal says, "I think you are the perfect person to ask."

Thankfully, at point, Will sees the telltale signs of Hannibal starting to wheeze, so he swims up and grabs Hannibal's face to perform a kiss. All species have their own special way of communicating, although most might call it magic. Some species share blood or thoughts or pheromones to demonstrate family connection and platonic or romantic interest, but merpeople share breath. The only difference is that when merpeople kiss another species, for a short time, the receiver takes on certain aspects of a merperson, such as being able to breathe underwater.

Of course, the downside is that it's short-lived. It's a temporary solution, not a permanent fix, so Will has to bestow a kiss at least once a day so that Hannibal's lungs remember how to breathe using water instead of air.

Hannibal never fights a kiss. Will's not quite sure why. But the two-legger just goes completely limp, and the first time Will had been alarmed and wrapped his entire tail around Hannibal, ready to shoot straight for the surface, but now he just curls himself around and over the two-legger so that Hannibal doesn't slump so far he bangs his head on the rocks.

It's . . . comforting, in a way. To share breath is to make yourself completely vulnerable, even as your partner is dependent on you for life.

Hannibal might, for example, use Will's closeness to stab him, but Will is the only reason Hannibal is still alive underwater. It is an intoxicating feeling for Will, to know that he could die right here, right now, and the only thing that stays Hannibal's hand is his own desire to not fight back or kill.

Because Hannibal is a killer. This Will knows beyond a shadow of a doubt, because coffee and sauces are not the only things Will tastes on the back of Hannibal's breath as he pushes life-giving air into the two-legger's lungs.

When it's over, Will lays Hannibal gently done on his bed. The two-legger is dazed and compliant as his lungs struggle to readjust, as he always is, and it gives Will the perfect opportunity to go hunting when his two-legger is too out of it to cause trouble.

Besides, Will tells himself, he can always kill Hannibal tomorrow. One more day should be enough to satisfy his curiosity about two-leggers.

---

“How are you able to allow me to breathe underwater?”

“It’s just a kiss.”

“I understand that. But the ability to pass water through my lungs and not perish – ”

“Are beyond me. It just works, okay? Besides, I’ll probably kill you in the morning, anyways. I can’t let you leave now that you know.”

“Fair enough.”

---

“Is there any correlation between tail color and personality or genetics?”

“How in the name of Atlantis am I supposed to know?”

“Do you have no memory of your parents?”

“ . . . I did not save your life to explain merpeople reproduction to you. Actually. How *do* you two-leggers reproduce? I’ve never seen it.”

“I would imagine not. But I think that’s a story for another day.”

“Fine. Besides, I’ll probably kill you in the morning anyways.”

“If you say so, Will.”

---

“How old are you, Will?”

“Well, that’s rather a personal question.”

“And that is not an answer.”

“I dunno. We measure time differently than you, I think. I mean, you said you’re in your forties or fifties, but you look way too young for that.”

“I wonder what the specifics are between – ”

“No, I am not getting into that tonight, I want to sleep.”

“Tomorrow, then.”

“Maybe I’ll just kill you first so I don’t have to pull out the charts.”

“As you wish.”

---

“Hannibal,” Will whispers.

He doesn't expect Hannibal to hear him, since they've already learned that Will's hearing is far more sensitive than any human's. Yet still, Hannibal opens his eyes and turns over to glance at him. Even half awake, Hannibal still reminds Will of a shark, ever-watchful and ever-dangerous.

"Yes, Will?"

" . . . I don't want. I don't want to kill you."

"Well, I imagine I still have a lot to tell you about the human race."

"No, I mean. Even after. I think – I know. I want to keep you."

Hannibal blinks, long and slow. He thinks so quickly, Will knows, yet sometimes even the things Will thinks he's made perfectly clear are the ones Hannibal takes longer to respond to.

Hannibal licks his lips. He has no need to, but Will imagines it's a two-legger habit he's unable to get rid of just yet, even though it's been months since he fell through the ice and Will swam off with him. "I think," Hannibal murmurs, "I would quite like to keep you too."

For the first time, Will kisses him the human way – no exchange of breath, no reason behind it, no emergency to nip at their tails.

Just a kiss.

---

Hannibal eyes the hut with such dubious eyes that it almost makes Will bolder in passing, just to make Hannibal crankier when he swims faster and drags the two-legger along when he can't quite keep up with his strange human flapping of arms and legs to propel himself through the water.

Will's still not certain why it bothers him. Will swims much faster, and it really is no trouble to just pull Hannibal along.

"Are you . . . entirely certain about this?"

"Legend says she once turned a mermaid into a two-legger," Will explains, dodging some of the wild seaweed beds that seek to seize his tail. "I don't see why she would not be able to turn a human into one of us."

"Dearest," Hannibal says, sounding pained, "that story most certainly does not have a happy ending."

"Well. I mean. Most stories don't."

"Will – "

The door opens abruptly to reveal someone even Will wasn't really prepared for. The legends whisper of a merperson cursed with the lower half of their sworn enemy, he-of-the-many-arms-and-legs, but this . . . this does not seem like an evil, cackling trickster. In fact, she

looks more like Jack, weary and resigned and beaten down by the sea's problems. She even has some kelp wine in her hand, and rather potent wine from the scent of it.

The witch looks from Will to where he holds Hannibal's hand and back, and then sighs. "I had heard rumors of a merman keeping a human pet," she says. "I should have guessed you would turn up eventually."

"I would like – "

"I know what you want. It's what they all want. Well, come in, you're letting in the cold currents."

The witch's hut is cluttered and disorganized and dirty. Will hovers in the air, unwilling to touch some of the glowing potions, but Hannibal takes one look and just outright refuses to sit on all the dirty furniture.

"You do realize," the witch says, after another huge gulp of wine, "that my services don't come cheap."

"What kind of payment do you accept?" Hannibal asks.

The witch laughs. "Nothing you could offer me, human. Or, at least, nothing I imagine you would willingly part with anyways."

"How would you know, if you have not yet stated your terms?"

"Oooh, this one thinks it's clever. Okay, I'll bite." The witch touches a nearby table, and several ingredients float over, some glowing and shimmering and shining, and others as seemingly common as pebbles and abandoned shells. "The price of any magic is reflected in difficulty. You wish to change the very fabric of your being. That's one of the most difficult, and therefore one of the most expensive. Also, you must understand that it does not come without its risks. I can start the process, but you might take badly to it or you might hate what you've become. And I'm afraid that I'm what you humans call a 'no returns allowed' kind of seller. I will not turn you back into a human once you've committed."

Hannibal shrugs, a rolling, gentle poster that flows through his entire body. It's a merperson gesture, and Will swells with affection at the sight of it. "I accept the risks. The possibility of death is what gives life meaning."

"Don't say I didn't warn you," the witch mutters. "All right."

"Will this require my voice?"

"Don't be silly. To change the very fabric of your being, I'll take much more than that. As payment for my services, I will ask of you for the greatest thing I can. A change for a change, so to speak."

"Name it."

The witch's eyes gleam, and just for one second, one tiny second, Will sees the monster the legends whisper of. "Mischa," she says.

Hannibal goes rigid.

"She changed you. Now you ask me to change you again. A change for a change," the witch repeats.

Will looks at Hannibal. He already knows Hannibal does not wish to part with whatever the witch asks for, although he can't possibly know what or who "Mischa" is.

Still.

The witch never did say that it was *Hannibal* who had to pay.

"Take it from me," Will says quietly.

The witch looks at him. "Cousin," she says gently, "are you sure? I will ask a higher price, if it comes from you."

Will shrugs. "Hannibal and I are two halves of the same shell. We will always know each other, with or without my voice or my tail. I'm afraid that I don't have much of value that you would consider as highly as Mischa."

"On the contrary. I think I know exactly what to take."

"Will," Hannibal interrupts. He brushes a hand down Will's tail, face twitching. Will would call it regret, but he's not quite sure Hannibal feels it. "Will, you need not do this. Not for me. Not to yourself."

Hannibal's eyes are so, so wide.

Will kisses him, just one last time. Just one last time, for one more day. Just for the sheer, human pleasure of it, and oh, to feel the way Hannibal comes alive for the first time, kissing back just as fiercely, nails clawing into Will's skin and scales, one leg wound around Will's tail. Will already knows he will treasure it for the rest of his life, however short or long it is.

Then Will turns, and faces the witch, and says, "I'm ready. Take your price."

The witch curls around him, so many arms and legs twisting and twirling until she's almost swallowed Will entirely, and she leans down and kisses his forehead, once, twice, thrice, like a ritual, and she tells him, "Oh, cousin. I will dine on your memories for *centuries* to come, they are so *beautiful*."

"My memories – ? "

Will's world goes black.

---

Will wakes to find himself sprawled outside his den, sand everywhere and scratches on his skin. At first he thinks that he's had yet another run-in with someone trying to challenge him for his territory, but challenging merpeople don't leave simple scratches. They leave scars, and sometimes bites and scales ripped straight from tails.

Still, after a moment, he just shrugs and gets up to carry on with his day.

When he looks at his garden, which is strangely a neater and tended to than he remembers, he gets the strangest feeling, almost like he's forgetting something, but then Winston bumps him and barks happily at him, and Will brushes it aside in favor of making dinner.

---

Three days later, a merman shows up.

He has a long tail, red and gold that shimmers underwater like the setting sun setting ablaze the waves, and silver fins like a shark. His torso is covered in scars that speak of successful victories and he smells . . . strange. Will's never smelled any ocean or river or sea that smells anything close to what he smells off of this merman. He's fast, too, far faster than Will, and teeth when he bares them that are sharper than a shark.

Will flicks his tail through the sand, sending up a spray of sand into water to give him the appearance of a bigger size. "What do you want?"

"Will," says the merman. "Will, I've been looking for you."

Will bares his own teeth. They aren't nearly as sharp – they slowly lost their edges as Will stuck to a diet consisting mostly of seaweed, clams, and crabs – but he's still dangerous. "If you're from Atlantis, you can swim right back there. I am not joining their little experiment of a city there. The death rates must be so high."

"Atlantis? Will – I." The merman pushes a little closer, just enough for Will to splay his own fins in challenge, but he seems completely unbothered. "Will, you don't remember me?"

"I've got a good memory. I think I'd remember you."

The merman blinks. His eyes are unlike any merperson Will's ever seen – not the blues of the water or the greens of the seaweed or the white of foam – but a deep, rich red, so dark red it's almost brown. And his hair is straight and floats so neatly around his head, when for most merpeople with short hair, the hair inevitably ends up curly like Will's from constant switching from water to air to water again.

"A change for a change," the merman murmurs, almost to himself.

" . . . Sure. Please leave. Now."

"You saved me," the merman says. "It would be rather remiss of me not to repay that debt."

Will has to laugh at that. He'd sooner push another merperson into the jaws of a shark than save their life. "I've never seen before in my life – "

With a flick of his tail, the merman swoops closer, scaring off Winston who flees with a startled yelp. The feel of his hand on Will's hip is strange – startling, because Will hasn't been touched by another merperson in a long, long time, and yet part of Will knows that touch, softens his spine and inches his tail forward, gentle and calm, to twine cautiously against this stranger.

The merman touches his neck. "Will. I am Hannibal."

"I don't remember you," is all Will can manage, because he doesn't – in all of his long life, he remembers nothing about this stranger – and yet, *and yet* he knows this merman better than he knows himself. He knows exactly what Hannibal smells like, what his hand feels like against Will's skin, what his next words will be.

"I know. I suppose that is a call to make new memories."

"What I never remember you?" Will whispers.

"Then I'll just settle for changing you again," Hannibal says, and then he closes the gap between them for a kiss that leaves Will dazed and dizzy and, for the first time, looking forward to getting to know another one of his kind.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Day 29's prompt was "Mittens/Gloves"!

And before I get a comment or message about it (although who knows, maybe no one was thinking about it at all, in which case my bad): Yeah, I do have a Little Mermaid Hannigram AU floating around somewhere. No, this was not a prototype of it. But maybe one day I shall write one :D

# Day 29: Mittens/Gloves

Chapter Summary

> Will calls him either the Mitten Man or Doctor Arsehole, and honestly he's stunned the suit-surgeon-man still brings him food.

Chapter Notes

> Warnings: some not polite language, but other than that we're good I think
>
> This was inspired by that one House episode about face blindness, also known as prosopagnosia, and I'd like to say that I tried my best to portray some of it but I don't know anyone with it and I am not a doctor/nurse/medical personnel sooooo my portrayal might be off.
>
> HUGE thanks to Doctor B for patiently answering my bazillion questions and for giving me some of the most romantic dialogue I've ever seen.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A lot of people think it’s funny to say that they’re bad with names or faces. Will would like to respectfully but firmly say that having prosopagnosia is not at all funny.

And it’s that Will doesn’t *try*, okay? He actually tries a lot. When he was younger, he used to keep notebooks and notebooks filled with scraps of paper to try and put faces to names. As technology advanced, he tried keeping scrapbooks with pictures and then Facebook albums and now, as a fully fledged adult in most of the sense of the word, Will’s just tired.

*Do you have any idea*, Will wants to shout when people laugh at him, *how tiring it is? How creepy it is? To empathize and feel so strongly with people who you don’t recognize?*

It’s why he starts wearing glasses. Partly, of course, to create the barrier between people’s emotions and his own, but also to give himself a convenient reason to squint and fail to recognize someone’s face. People, he finds, are a lot more accepting of the idea that he has bad eyesight and that causes him to not recognize faces than to understand that in fact he has an inability to recognize faces altogether.

People are strange like that.

---

And then, one cold day, Jack Crawford calls Will out to a crime scene on a windy beach, which does at all improve Will's mood. It's early, he hasn't had his coffee, and the wind blows right through his old coat, because Jack yelled so much and so loudly that Will hustled straight outside without stopping to get his new coat.

This is probably why Will does nothing but grunt when he bumps into a sharply dressed man.

"My apologies," says the suit.

Will says nothing back. He's not a particularly sociable or charitable man on a good day, and today is most certainly not one of his good days. Besides, this man looks like a consultant, given that he dresses like he sneezes on gold tissues and wipes his butt with diamond toilet paper and Will knows for a fact that the FBI does not pay that much. So Will, who is an actual FBI agent, doesn't really feel inclined to play nice with someone who's not even really supposed to be this close to the admittedly gruesome crime scene.

"A man of few words, aren't you?" the suit ventures.

"It's early."

"It is never too early to be polite."

"Are you a philosopher or a policeman?"

"Neither," the suit replies, sounding highly amused, even though his face doesn't twitch even the slightest.

Will looks him up and down. Rich, confident bearing, slender fingers, strong shoulders, eyes that pierce like daggers. Old money, high power job, probably one that comes with a million credentials on whatever fancy cardstock he prints his business cards on. And probably lined with gold leaf too. "Surgeon," Will guesses.

The suit blinks. It's like an irregular stitch in the fabric of his suit, as if Will had reached out and made the unforgivable faux pas of picking at a loose thread and yanking it loose. "Former surgeon. How did you know?"

"You're an arsehole," Will says flatly, because he's used up his sociable talking quota for the day and he can't wait for Jack to come over.

The suit smiles, and it's not a nice smile. It's the smile a thread makes just before the needle punctures the fabric, the smile a lion gives before it swallows a mouse, the smile a witch makes before offering a poison apple in one hand and hiding a dagger behind her back. Dangerous, but, Will supposes, suitable for someone who's used to literally holding the power of life or death over other human beings he probably regards as foolish for getting in whatever situation that landed them on his operating table.

"I suppose I should be blessed with the privilege of knowing that my arse was the subject of the attention of the famous Agent William Graham."

Will's eyes snap up almost before he can stop himself, but he's wearing his glasses, and he knows better than to look higher than the black rims, so he manages to come to a halt just above the man's chin, and damn, this suit has some sharp cheekbones. He's also sure that the pause didn't escape the notice of this suit, but there's nothing he can do now.

The suit inclines his head. "Good day, Agent Graham. I wish you luck in catching this killer."

Behind him, Will just stares.

---

The next time they meet, the man is wearing a completely new suit, and it's so eye-wateringly flamboyant Will has no idea who he is until the man opens his mouth and then, well. Then there's no doubt.

"Agent Graham."

"Dr. Arsehole," Will replies, which makes Jack splutter.

The suit raises a hand. "Calm yourself, Agent Crawford. I assure you that this is no way offends my sensibilities. At least you employ agents who are responsible enough to recognize that better clothes are needed in colder weather."

Will, who only just barely remembered to put on his new coat and only because Buster decided to roll all over the old one, huddles deeper into his coat and glares at the man's stupidly expensive shiny shoes. Jack stole his glasses, so he can't use them as a reminder against the world and therefore he refuses to look above anyone's knees whilst the crime scene is still milling with dozens of nosy and loud agents.

In his head, he says, *And that's why you're Doctor Arsehole*.

Will is startled out of his witty repartee with himself when the suit's hands are suddenly grasping his own, depositing a pair of the softest mittens Will's ever held.

"A token of my congratulations," the suit says, "for catching the man who built the totem of his victims."

"I can't – "

"I am not in the habit of taking back gifts once they have been given."

Will actually does have a pair of gloves somewhere in his house. He doesn't use them simply because he often forgets they even exist. It's not like gloves were a necessity in a life where simply paying the water or electricity bill was sometimes a luxury, never mind buying new and warm boots and coats and hats.

"I can't accept this."

"Well, as doctor," the suit says, "I would recommend you accept them anyways. Unless you would prefer to end up before me for the treatment of frostbite?"

Will glowers. He hates hospitals and he's fairly certain this suit knows it.

---

The next time, he makes a point of showing up and wearing the mittens but only after his pack has had a fair amount of time to play with them, and they're covered in a generous helping of fur that range all over the color spectrum. It seems to cause the suit no end of physical pain, and it makes Will so gleeful that he misses the way that the pain transforms into speculation and challenge.

The suit ambushes him with Tupperware filled with soup.

Will returns the Tupperware, but only after recounting how he had warmed up the leftover soup in the microwave.

Somehow, in some strange way, Will starts looking forward to meeting the suit at crime scenes. After a while, calling him "Doctor Arsehole" becomes too tedious so Will just settles for calling him the Mitten Man, and he can't explain the kind of relaxation it causes, to never have the pressure of remembering the suit's name to match with his face. He's a doctor and Will's certain he has some suspicions, but the Mitten Man never calls him out of it or, even worse, tries to offer "helpful" tips or suggestions for treatment.

He just brings Will more food.

They eat homemade apple pie decorated with tiny, elegantly fashioned animals and flowers on the lattice and argue about Aristotle. In commemoration for the killer who starts replacing people's eyes with marbles, the Mitten Man makes mac'n'cheese, although it's the tastiest and heartiest mac'n'cheese Will has ever eaten. When a killer starts wrapping victims in fishing nets and dumping them in shallow ponds, the Mitten Man takes Will's offerings of fresh fish and comes back with the weirdest dish Will's ever seen, fish turned inside out and twisted round, so elegant and so strange that Will can hardly eat them without staring at them first.

And on and on the cycle goes, until one day, Will turns up without his mittens.

The Mitten Man takes one look at him and frowns. "Will." His voice is so serious it makes Will blink. "Will, are you all right?"

"Just tired."

It's not technically a lie. He did spend more of the night sleepwalking on random roads than actually sleeping, so he thinks he qualifies for being so tired that he barely feels like himself and most definitely forgot his mittens at home.

The Mitten Man touches his forehead, as if to take his temperature, and it's strange because the Mitten Man has been pretty good at preserving Will's personal space, but then Will sees his nostrils flare – he still refuses to look above the man's nose because, you know, eyes and all – and Will can't stop himself from saying, "Did you just *smell* me?"

"Yes," the Mitten Man says shortly. "Did you know you had encephalitis?"

“ . . . What?”

And that’s how Will learns the real name of the Mitten Man, when he pulls Will off to the side, takes out the shiniest phone Will’s ever seen, presses a number, and says, “I’m Doctor Hannibal Lecter, and I need am ambulance now.”

---

Will is treated to a dizzying array of tests, and he gets the impression that normally, it doesn’t quite happen this fast, but the Mitten Man is insistent and apparently has some type of leverage in this hospital, because Will not only gets an entire team of doctors pouring over his records, he also gets a private suite with his own bedroom, his own television, and his own bathroom.

By the time the Mitten Man turns up, dressed in a white lab coat, Will is so far past dignity he’s taken to hiding under the sheets and pretending to be asleep.

“Will.”

“I’m sleeping.”

“Actually, it looks like you are attempting to suffocate yourself.”

“Works for me, given that my body was attempting to cook my brain and fry my mind on its own.”

A hand pulls gently at the sheet, and Will only relinquishes it because the medicine has made him woozy and weak. It’s definitely not because the Mitten Man is stroking his hair and his hands are welcome against the unfamiliar barrage of latex-wielding nurses who’d been clinically efficient and cold and honestly being petted actually feels kind of nice, definitely not that at all.

“Will,” says the Mitten Man. “I promise I will be with you every step of the way.”

And Will, for the first time, looks up at the man whose face he will at once never remember and never forget, and he sees so much and so little, because this man *feels so much* but Will only grasps a fraction of it beneath the murky water that makes up this man’s defenses, because the eye-watering suits don’t just apply to physical clothing that this man dons whenever he’s around other people.

Will clutches at his hand. “Thank you,” he blurts out.

“I would do nothing less for a friend.”

And now Will has to talk because the man probably thinks Will is referring to the private suite or the life-saving diagnosis by sniffing, because of course that’s Will’s life, but actually, Will isn’t talking about that. The Mitten Man is rich beyond compare, so the private suite is nothing to him, and he’s a doctor who prides himself on his experience and expertise, so the diagnosis probably wasn’t anything special to him either.

No, what is special to Will is that first contact, that first kindness.

“Not for this. For the mittens.”

The Mitten Man looks at him and then, quite suddenly, leans down and kisses him quite gently on the forehead. He smells nice, like pine trees and warm spices and old paper books. Will kind of wants to bottle his scent for a rainy cold day or to rub into his blankets and curl up with.

“I would do no less,” the Mitten Man repeats, “for a friend.” And his voice lingers on *friend*, and Will knows he could dig deeper into that curious tone but right now he doesn’t really want to. He just wants to stay here, in this little warm cocoon, where the only spotlight is this man’s attention and his only job is to get better and sleep, and really the only thing that would make it perfect is if they allowed dogs in the hospital.

The thought of the Mitten Man trying to wrangle his unruly pack without getting fur and saliva everywhere makes Will grin.

“What do you see when you look at me, Will? Do you see nothing, just like everyone else?”

And damn it, Will suspected he might have figured it out, but that’s okay, because Will has something to say back, for the first time since he ever developed prosopagnosia, and he’s damn well going to say it.

“My eyes,” Will says, and he has to cough to clear his throat, but the Mitten Man is patient and he waits. “My eyes and my brain, they might not recognize your face. But my heart will always know you. When I look at you, I just – I see you, Hannibal. I see you.”

And he knows it’s not lost on Hannibal that it’s the first time Will’s ever uttered Hannibal’s true name, instead of calling him Doctor Arsehole or the Mitten Man.

“My sweet Will,” Hannibal murmurs, and kisses him again. “You are a treasure beyond compare.”

---

When Will finally gets out of the hospital, Hannibal greets with him new mittens, a warm homemade meal, and his entire pack of dogs milling around the parking lot.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Day 30's prompt was "New Year's Resolution" and, um, we're pretty past that but I'll try and make something out of it.

Day 31's prompt was "Kiss at Midnight" and I intend to do something with ghosts. Cuz apparently Halloween and Hannictober are still strong in my heart.

Again, HUGE HUGE HUGE thanks to Doctor B for the advice on the medical condition, possible medications, possible plot points, and that damn amazing romantic dialogue at the end. All Doctor B's. Cuz on top of making the best cannimals ever, Doctor B is the most patient medical go-to person ever :D

# Day 30: New Year's Resolution

Chapter Summary

"New Year's Resolution," Will says. "No more Santa roleplays for you."

Chapter Notes

Warnings: some implied dubcon, because it's Hannibal and he kidnaps people because . . . Hannibal

This was inspired by this post about leaving out cookies and milk for Santa Mads, which in turn was slightly inspired by that creepy, awesome, dark Death Stranding video game trailer where we all went "OH MY GOD TENTACLES MADS" and immediately started rolling the Hugh Dancy wheel to figure out who he'd be paired with. I think we settled on DeathHawk, last I heard.

ANYWAYS. Yes, the tentacles will be in this fic. Not for that though, get your minds out of the gutter ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hey, do you think you could make dog-friendly cookies this time around?”

The way Hannibal pauses, just ever so slightly, as he processes Will’s request tells Will everything he needs to know about what Hannibal will say next. It’s not that he worries Hannibal will tell him “No” – Hannibal’s been incredibly enthusiastic about saying “yes” and sometimes it’s like he’s forgotten that the word “No” even exists when it comes to Will – but he was worried that Hannibal might go ten steps above when all Will really wants are just dog friendly cookies to put with the milk by the tree.

“I can,” Hannibal says slowly, even as he moves away from the sink and gracefully dodges the roving pack of Will’s eager pups nosing for scraps. Only half a year ago and he would have tripped; now he weaves around them with practiced grace. “But may I ask why?”

“It’s a human thing.”

Hannibal raises an eyebrow, scrubbing slowly at a glass, but he doesn’t say anything. He’s learned that all too effective human trick of saying noting and waiting for his prey to spill the beans.

“No, seriously, it is,” Will insists. “On Christmas Eve, it’s tradition to lay out cookies and milk for Santa Claus when he comes down the chimney. But it’ll be after we go to bed and so I want dog-friendly cookies for when they inevitably try to steal one and eat it. Unless we want to buy a new carpet.”

“Again,” Hannibal says, because he’s truly insufferable sometimes about the downsides of pets, no matter the fact that last night Will caught him playing fetch with Zoe.

Will crosses his arms. “I offered to put some of them up for adoption when I moved in.”

Hannibal’s face softens. Sometimes Will has a hard time gauging Hannibal’s mood in terms of how much something annoys him, because sometimes a minor thing will stay a minor thing and other times a simple scent can send him into a murderous rampage where he sulks in the kitchen and sharpens all of the knives and speaks in riddles. At first, when he brushed off the idea of accommodating seven dogs in his house, Will had been worried it would be the latter, but nowadays it seems to truly be a minor thing for Hannibal.

“And I told you,” Hannibal replies, “that they are your family. I would not ask you to part with any of them.”

Which, fair enough. Family, Will has learned, is everything to Hannibal and his kind.

Will turns his face up, and Hannibal responds as he always does, greedy for every part of Will he can get, kissing him like Will is everything he needs to live. Originally it had made Will think he was just touch-starved, but even after three years together, Hannibal is still as greedy – if not greedier – for any bit of Will he can get, so Will just shrugs and takes advantage of it and puts it down to his species. It’s not like Hannibal has the brain cells to argue against that once Will’s kissed his face off.

“So,” Will says, “dog-friendly cookies?”

Hannibal gives him literal heart eyes, which Will figures is a good enough “yes”.

---

The first time he hears a bark, Will just groans and rolls back over. Occasionally his pack gets way too excited about random wildlife outside, because they’re used to squirrels and raccoons, but in Hannibal’s neck of woods there’s a lot more interesting and twitchy wildlife. So usually Will just ignores them and eventually they quiet down.

This time, though, there’s another bark. And then another.

Without even opening his eyes, Will whistles sharply. He trains his dogs very well, even if they still sometimes make off with one of Hannibal’s shoes or socks from time to time, so usually after he makes the “hush” whistle they settle down.

And then there’s a huge *bang*, as if something metal and huge has met an unfortunate end on the floor, followed by what sounds – in Hannibal’s amplifying hallways – like an entire alley of dogs barking their heads up, and Will sits up and flails his way straight to the floor because if there’s one thing that *will* make Hannibal grumpy about Will’s dogs, it’s when they

interrupt his sleep and Hannibal's hearing is so good there's no way he missed that explosion of sound.

Except, when Will looks over, an apology ready on his lips, the other side of the bed is empty.

And not even empty and warm, like Hannibal had vaulted out of bed on his own and just beat Will to dealing with his noisy dogs or ran to the bathroom, it's empty and cold as if Hannibal had left ages ago.

Will sighs. And here he had thought that they had had an agreement concerning hunting and alibis and all that . . .

Which is why, as he creeps down the hallway, he's completely shocked to find Hannibal kneeling on the floor, scooping up cookies and dabbing up spilled milk, all the while shushing Will's eager pack of panting tongues and wagging tails. He's wearing the most garish red suit Will's ever seen and, on top of that, all of his cords are out in the open, and, well, Will had already known that Hannibal was of an age and rank to have eight cords and that the cords could attach to any living being, he's never seen them all out at once. Now they're all waving around, with seven connecting to Will's dogs – which is presumably why his dogs are silent, even as they pant and watch with eager eyes.

Will cocks a hip against the door. "Quite loud for a Santa Claus, aren't you?"

Hannibal freezes. "Will."

"And here I thought that your species didn't have any legends about Santa Claus and you knew nothing about him."

"I. Well." Hannibal stands slowly, the dogs milling around him and getting all the cords tangled all over his feet, to place the platter with the cookies and remaining milk down, and he has the most sheepish expression Will's ever had the joy and privilege of seeing on his face. "I might have . . . done some research."

Will laughs. He can't help it. Hannibal is one of the most fearsome members of his entire species, to the point that he can't go anywhere without people turning interesting colors, suddenly losing the ability to speak, or even outright fleeing. He spends most of his time hunting down prey, and to know that he spent precious time researching age-old made-up stories about Santa Claus is just so endearing Will can't help but laugh.

"I found it interesting," Hannibal tries to explain. "The way your kind made up so many stories and wove them together."

"Of course *you* would find it interesting. Searching for another human weakness?"

"Will," Hannibal says wryly, "you *are* my human weakness."

And damn it all to hell, English is definitely not Hannibal's first or best tongue, but sometimes, his words are the sweetest, most perfect thing Will's ever heard. It's what Will gets, he suspects, for agreeing to give up life on Earth and come live with Hannibal and his

people after they decided that Earth was not worth the trouble of conquering on its own. Hannibal had become fixated on Will after he had explained in exasperation to the puffed-up generals that the way Hannibal and his kind had left was not, in fact, any compliment of human ability, but rather pure indifference; Hannibal had spent years infiltrating and learning about humanity, and had come to the conclusion they were just as likely to discover space travel as they were to self-destruct and therefore, in time they would either need Hannibal's kind's help to travel or just die out and Hannibal and his kind could colonize Earth with no problem.

That's not, of course, to say, that Will still wasn't taken aback when Hannibal had promptly kidnapped him in the dead of night and started trying to court him in his spaceship. Will very fondly remembers how he'd punched Hannibal in the face and stepped on one of his cords.

"Come here, you," Will says roughly, and he kisses Hannibal again. It's a human thing, kissing, but Hannibal is a fast learner and he's pretty damn good at it.

"Let's make a New Year's resolution," Will murmurs when they part, Hannibal flustered and dogs barking everywhere. "And before you protest, I know that you know what those are. Why don't we try asking about each other's culture first before we try it out for ourselves? So – no more Santa roleplays for you."

Hannibal's eyes gleam, but he doesn't protest, which is pretty good because otherwise Will would have to remind him of the infamous Easter bunny incident.

Because it's *infamous*.

As in, it's nearly New Year's and Will's dogs still sometimes dig up a random egg from somewhere.

"Very well," Hannibal agrees. "So, when are you going to ask me to connect to you?"

"Um – "

A cord detaches from one of Will's dogs, followed by the telltale flash of red-gold sparkles as the cord retreats into the biological pouch hidden next to Hannibal's intestines. Will had once called it Hannibal's kangaroo pouch, but he had never suspected that Hannibal knew how greatly Will had wondered what it would be like, to feel that cord connecting to him instead of everything else.

Hannibal grins when he catches Will following the rest of the cords with his eyes as they detach, one by one, from Will's dogs, who immediately lose interest and wander off to their beds.

"You have been watching me. And with a great deal of interest."

"I wasn't sure," Will says. "If. You know."

If Hannibal would say yes. If Hannibal would say no. If he would able to know which answer would be worse.

Hannibal cocks his eyes, but there's no superior gleam that is usually associated with the movement. In anything, he draws Will closer, arms warm and his breath hot against Will's face, his face a peculiar mix of fondness and exasperation. "Will," he says, "how could I deny you anything? I have wanted to connect with you from the moment you drew your gun and tried to shoot me."

"Your fault for not disarming me," Will retorts reflexively.

Then it sinks in.

"Wait, what?"

"I have wanted," Hannibal repeats patiently, "to connect with you from the first moment I laid eyes on you. To share your mind, to know your thoughts, to feel your emotions – I could think of no greater thing than to connect us and know you as intimately as your ability allows you to know me."

And, well, didn't they just make a very relevant New Year's resolution on that matter?

"Hannibal," Will asks formally, because connection is important in Hannibal's kind and the ritual of asking matters, just as much as the ritual of laying out cookies and milk for a fat man in a red suit who slides down the chimney, "will you do me the honor of connecting with me?"

There's a whisper of displaced air, but for the first time Will doesn't watch as one and then two and then three cords emerge from Hannibal's stomach, arching and curling through the air to settle at the base of his neck and along his spine. He's too busy watching the way Hannibal's eyes dilate, as if he can't quite believe what is happening, as if he thinks this is his most precious moment, something he will never forget.

Will won't ever forget it either.

"Oh my sweet Will," Hannibal replies, "it would be my *pleasure*."

And then the cords sink into Will's skin, and there is no pain, not even the slightest twinge or pinch, just *falling*, down and down and down into the ravenous darkness that is Hannibal and Will, and Will –

Will never wants to leave.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Day 31's prompt was "Kiss At Midnight" and it'll be coming tomorrow! It will involve ghosts, some very drunk Will, and (duh) kisses.

Oh, I forgot to mention that a third source of inspiration was from The Matrix. Like getting plugged in by those port-thingys people had. Without the port thingys for this fic. Just Hannibal and Will getting some sweet, sweet tentacle love :D

# Day 31: Kiss At Midnight

Chapter Summary

> The first time Will had set foot in the “Haunted House of Chandler Square” he had been greeted with no less than subzero temperatures, three floating pots, two flickering lights, and one very angry ghost.

Chapter Notes

> Warnings: some references to Hannibal scaring the crap out of people, but it's not terribly descriptive
>
> This was inspired by this post about ghosts and real estate agents, because it made me laugh.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first time Will had set foot in the “Haunted House of Chandler Square” he had been greeted with no less than subzero temperatures, three floating pots, two flickering lights, and one very angry ghost. He had promptly turned around and walked right back.

This time, the second he sees the first pot rise from the rack and cold breath sneak down his spine as he toes off his shoes, he hears, “*How dare you enter the house of –* ”

“Relax, it’s me.”

The pot abruptly lowers itself back into place. The house warms up immediately, the lights returning to their normal status, and in general the house feels immediately more homely and less haunted. It would be enough to give Will whiplash, but for the fact that he’s seen and heard this display no less than ten times, which he admits has given him unique insight into just how bored Hannibal can get when he’s thinking up new ways to scare off people.

“William,” Hannibal says, flickering into view at the edge of the staircase.

Will never looks directly at him. It’s not just because Will abhors eye contact, but because it’s actually impossible to see Hannibal if Will tries to look directly at him. Hannibal is a ghost, and like all ghosts and spirits, he is best seen around corners and at the corners of one’s eyes, always just out of sight.

“Hannibal,” Will replies, because even as a ghost Hannibal is a stickler for politeness.

Hannibal inclines his head. “Have you succeeded in your quest to sell the house?”

Will looks from Hannibal to the pot that’s still floating gently above the kitchen rack and then back to Hannibal.

“Ah.”

---

It’s not like it was Will’s choice to inherit and have to try and sell the great big house everyone thinks – rightfully, as it turns out – is haunted. Someone left it to Will when they up and died, through some complicated legalese inheritance stuff Will still hasn’t quite figured out, filled with flowery language like “to discover the destiny you have already lived” and “two halves brought together by fate but never quite intersecting”. Will’s been trying ever since to sell it, although this has been slightly complicated by the existence of Hannibal.

Hannibal, according to Will’s research, is actually Count Hannibal Lecter VIII, of an old Lithuanian line that died out ages and ages ago.

Quite conveniently, Hannibal has no memory of this. Or of how he died. Or even when he died.

So now he just hangs out in the house and mostly just plays harmless but strangely elegant pranks on whoever comes to see the house. Like moving things *just* out of alignment, tweaking people’s clothes, or even closing doors randomly when no one’s near them. Little things, but just enough that, given the history of this house, a lot of people have passed on buying the house.

Hannibal’s like the sassiest ghost ever, actually. One time Will attempted to cook food, and Hannibal hovered the entire damn time, giving tips on ingredients and spices and one time even wrestling some knife straight out of Will’s hand, claiming he was using it all wrong.

This, Will likes to tell Hannibal, is why no one wants to live in his creepy haunted house.

Which is why, come New Year’s Eve, Will ends up drinking alone in the basement with only Hannibal for company, both of them trading increasingly sassier comments on whatever famous singer or speaker is on television entertaining before the ball drops.

“Who allowed that color combination, it is obscene.”

Will hiccups. “Hannibal, it’s *fashion*. No one cares.”

“They should care,” Hannibal sniffs. “Even in fashion, where some creativity is lauded and some levity allowed, there are still rules to be followed by any person who wishes to be considered mature and decent.”

“That’s rich coming from you.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Hannibal, I took a shower and you stole my underwear.”

Hannibal crosses his legs, entirely unrepetant. “They clashed with your eyes. I did replace them with a more suitable candidate. You should be thanking me.”

“I am not thanking you for rummaging through my underwear.”

“Well, you refused to allow me to rummage, as you claim, through the rest of your wardrobe.”

Will takes a long swallow of his beer. It actually tastes pretty good, even though Hannibal refuses to tell him exactly how he made it, given that he’s demonstrated pretty effectively where his boundaries are. Hannibal is mostly independent, but even he is bound to certain property lines he cannot cross without starting to flicker like bad reception on a television.

“Were you a fashion designer or something when you died?”

“No,” Hannibal says flatly, and nothing else.

For all of Will’s research, he hasn’t quite managed to dig up exactly what Hannibal was when he died. Everyone says that he was greatly respected in the community, but no one says why, and people tend to get weird when Will presses them about a centuries-long-dead Count. So instead he’s left to play this Rumplestiltskin game with Hannibal, throwing out careers left and right and hoping something sticks.

Judging by Hannibal’s amused reactions, he hasn’t gotten anywhere near close.

---

Three hours later, Will has managed to mow through most of the alcohol he brought, including all of Hannibal’s beer, and he’s pretty sure that he’s closer to intoxicated than sober. But if anything, that makes him more determined to discover more of Hannibal’s secrets, not less.

“Painter?”

“No.”

“Professor?”

“No.”

“Drug dealer?”

“William.”

Will throws up his hands, and Hannibal neatly moves out of the way. It’s a good thing too, because Will learned the hard way that moving through a ghost is not at all pleasant. “I’m running out of ideas!”

“Where is that imagination you pride yourself on?”

“Jack prides himself on it, not me.”

“Ah, yes. Agent Crawford.”

Will points a shaky finger at Hannibal’s shifting form. “Not – Nothing from you.” They’re all lucky Jack brushed of Hannibal’s temper tantrum as a sleep-deprived hallucination.

Hannibal sighs, but not the great, gusty way Will would have. A little, polite sigh, like the reverse of a little, polite sip of tea. Because it’s Hannibal and of course that’s how he sighs. “Why are you so determined to learn what my career was? I imagine it has long since changed since I left – the profession.”

Will closes his eyes. If there’s one thing drinking does make him, it’s lonely. “Because you’re my friend. Kinda like . . . my only friend.”

Silence meets his answer.

Which, really, Will should have expected, given that Hannibal doesn’t need to breathe or shift or anything that living humans need to do that makes noise, but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t hurt. Will’s been lonely all his life, but never as lonely as right now, realizing that his closest friend is a centuries-long-dead ghost who refuses to even tell Will what he used to do before he died, never mind the reason why he still haunts this house so many years after.

“I talked,” Hannibal says suddenly. “I talked to people. And I listened to their problems.”

Will’s jaw drops. “You’re a psychiatrist?!”

“Were,” Hannibal corrects.

“Ugh.”

“And that is why I did not tell you.”

“Smug bastard.”

“I knew both my father and my mother, William.” Hannibal tilts his head. “Anything else you would like to request of me, as a . . . friend?”

Will starts to shake his head, but then he looks at the screen, where apparently it’s getting close to the big ball drop and the screen is filled with people puckering up or some even kissing already, ready to ring in the new year with kisses aplenty. Even friends are hugging and crying and kissing each other on the cheeks, and quite suddenly, Will finds himself with the courage to say, “You wanna kiss me?”

“I beg your pardon?”

And wow, Will hadn’t known Hannibal could be flustered, but hey, here’s that tone of voice.

“Kiss me. Kinda like . . . tradition. Kiss at midnight. Didn’t you ever do that wherever you came from?”

For the first time, Will thinks he sees just the tiniest flicker of color in Hannibal's eyes. Just the tiniest, little shimmering flash of color, like a distant sunbeam glancing off of a raindrop to splash a beam of colors across the room.

And then the ball drops, and Hannibal surges forward and kisses him, and –

Warmth travels up and down Will's spine, and he says, "OUCH!"

With a thud, Hannibal falls off of him, and Will actually has to blink and rub his eyes and blink again, because it's *Hannibal*. But not ghost Hannibal, real, true, living breathing flesh and blood Hannibal, naked as the day he was born but *alive*, panting and gazing about with wonder in his eyes.

Will rubs at his leg. Hannibal weighs more than he looks and now his legs really hurt. "You never said you were cursed."

Hannibal coughs. "I . . . I didn't know."

"Should've said so sooner," Will says with a snort. "I would have kissed you ages ago to get rid of you and your little pranks."

Hannibal abandons exploring his newfound physical body at that, apparently satisfied, and decides instead to come crawling back up Will's lap like some kind of incubus, the strangest little smile on his face, ignoring Will's yelp of surprise to settle like some great big lapdog on Will's person, warm and soft-skinned and so wonderfully real.

"Maybe another kiss," Hannibal says, "just for good luck."

"To make sure it sticks, you mean."

"Well. If you insist."

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

AND THAT'S A WRAP, FOLKS!!!!!! Only . . . . . half a month behind schedule, lol.

Once again, I cannot thank each and every single one of you enough - every person who's left a comment, left a kudo, reblogged or liked my work, messaged me - seriously, YOU are the reason I am continually inspired to come back and write more fic and I am always floored and awed by how much you seem to like it.

I will be taking a teensy, tiny little break, but don't worry I won't be gone for long. At the very least, I still need to finish "said the ibex to the magpie" and I also have plans to

participate in #HannibalOdyssey. Aaaand I might have something cool coming for the month of February, so stay tuned for that!

# Index of All the Ficlets

Chapter Summary

This will be an index of sorts of all my ficlets in this collection, linking each prompt with the summary and associated tags. Hopefully this will make it easier for anyone returning to find a specific story (including me, lol, I gave up remembering what word was with which ficlet a looooooong time ago).

Chapter Notes

All of the tags aren't quite done yet, but I'm really tired right now so I'll come back and fix them all later :D

**Day 1: Holiday Cookies**
Summary: Will Graham is the *worst* baking student Hannibal's ever had.
Tags: Alternate Universe – Different First Meeting

**Day 2: Ornament**
Summary: Rule #3 was always never break an ornament. No one ever said it was because a sorcerer would tumble out.
Tags: Doctor Strange AU

**Day 3: Fireplace**
Summary: Truly, the last thing Will had expected was for the flames in the fireplace to start speaking to him.
Tags: Howl's Moving Castle AU

**Day 4: Snowball**
Summary: Hannibal is a centaur who likes eating the humans foolish enough to wander into Narnia. Then he meets Will.
Tags: Chronicles of Narnia AU

**Day 5: Eggnog**
Summary: No one believes it, but they do actually meet because Will had an allergic reaction to some spiked eggnog.
Tags: Alternate Universe – Different First Meeting

**Day 6: Holiday Cards**
Summary: When Will writes a nasty holiday card to Revenge, he really does not expect a guy

in a suit to turn up in his room.
Tags: Nemesis!Hannibal

**Day 7: Eskimo Kisses**
Summary: One day, the swan shed its cloak of feathers and made its way over to the man-who-was-not-a-man and said, "Why do you not swim with us, cousin-of-the-great-waters?" And the man-who-was-not-a-man said, "I cannot."
Tags: Selkie!Will, Swan!Hannibal

**Day 8: Christmas Lights**
Summary: Funnily enough, of all things, it's a middle school play that brings them together.
Tags: Kids!AU

**Day 9: Sledding**
Summary: "Little lamb," Hannibal says, "have you truly never gone sledding before?"
Tags: Shifter!AU

**Day 10: Holiday Sweater**
Summary: Hannibal is sneaking out of bed in the middle of the night. Will wants to know why. Surprisingly, it involves less dead bodies than he originally thought.
Tags: Domestic Fluff

**Day 11: Gingerbread House**
Summary: Will's grandmother always had warned him that gingerbread houses were to be avoided at all costs. Will makes the mistake of ignoring that warning.
Tags: Fairies!AU

**Day 12: Elf**
Summary: Will is an elf desperately trying to avoid the goblin King. Marak Ravenstag declares that he will have Will as his consort or no one else. Only one of them can win.
Tags: The Hollow Kingdom AU

**Day 13: Holiday Shopping**
Summary: Will's not thrilled about the alpha his father wants him to marry and he's even less thrilled that the man doesn't speak a word of English.
Tags: Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics

**Day 14: Secret Santa**
Summary: Will is the elf responsible for keeping the identity of the Santa a secret. Hannibal is the elf determined to get into his head.
Tags: Elves!AU

**Day 15: Star**
Summary: So they do as stars must never do: they fall.
Tags: Star!Hannibal, Star!Will

**Day 16: Presents**
Summary: Will gets an android as a present. The fact that the android picks a name that

rhymes with "cannibal" probably should have been a warning sign.
Tags: Space!AU

**Day 17: Reindeer**
Summary: Will gets an android as a present. The fact that the android picks a name that rhymes with "cannibal" probably should have been a warning sign.
Tags: Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them!AU

**Day 18: Mistletoe**
Summary: Will's a Feeder who survives off of human dreams. Hannibal is the very tasty new food source he's quickly going addicted to.
Tags: Creature!Will

**Day 19: Stocking**
Summary: Hannibal may be the monster under Will's bed, but Will is most certainly not afraid of him.
Tags: Monster!Hannibal, Dark!Will

**Day 20: Carols**
Summary: Will hasn't heard a song like that since he fell from Heaven. So of course the next day an elaborately posed corpse turns up.
Tags: Angels!AU

**Day 21: Christmas Tree**
Summary: "Listen, I am genetically modified and on the run and you *will* let me hide in behind your Christmas tree."
Tags: Creature!Will

**Day 22: Holiday Music/Movies**
Summary: Will's soulmate mark reads: "Here Comes Santa Claus". Needless to say, his hopes aren't exactly very high for finding his soulmate.
Tags: Soulmates!AU

**Day 23: Candy Cane**
Summary: Will's only going through one of the most important tests of his entire life, so of course Hannibal gives him only a candy cane. Of course he does, the bastard.
Tags: Kingsman!AU

**Day 24: Decorating/Decorations**
Summary: Will is the omega selected to stand in as proxy for the new queen. Hannibal is the alpha chosen to represent the new king. And it isn't just any wedding they stand as proxies in; they stand as proxies during the wedding and the consummation.
Tags: Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics

**Day 25: Holiday Party**
Summary: This is indeed a grand holiday party, but of course, only the best for the victors of the Hunger Games.
Tags: Hunger Games!AU

**Day 26: Snowman**
Summary: Will's got a gift for ice magic, so of course he does the natural thing. And no, the natural thing is not to make a snowman. This is Will Graham, after all.
Tags: Frozen!AU

**Day 27: Hot Chocolate**
Summary: “You were delayed by zombies because you decided it was absolutely necessary to help yourself to a bag of marshmallows?”
Tags: Zombie Apocalypse

**Day 28: Ice Skating**
Summary: In all fairness, Will had not woken up this morning with the express intention of breaking every single one of the cardinal laws about two-leggers.
Tags: Merman!Will

**Day 29: Mittens/Gloves**
Summary: Will calls him either the Mitten Man or Doctor Arsehole, and honestly he's stunned the suit-surgeon-man still brings him food.
Tags: Nice!Hannibal

**Day 30: New Year’s Resolution**
Summary: "New Year's Resolution," Will says. "No more Santa roleplays for you."
Tags: Alien!Hannibal

**Day 31: Kiss At Midnight**
Summary: The first time Will had set foot in the “Haunted House of Chandler Square” he had been greeted with no less than subzero temperatures, three floating pots, two flickering lights, and one very angry ghost.
Tags: Ghost!Hannibal

End Notes

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